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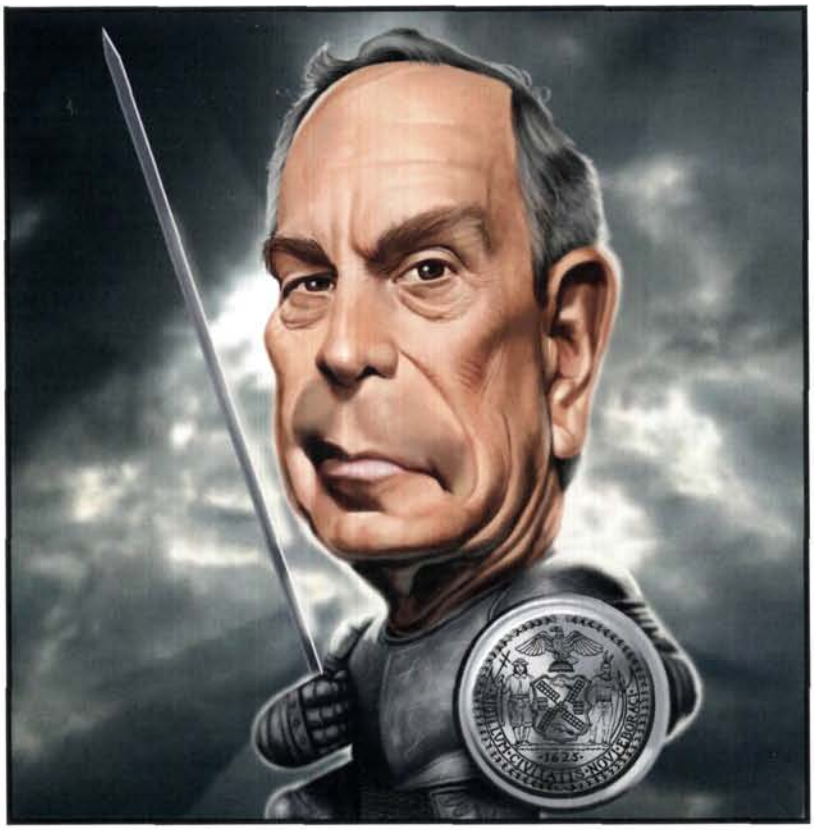
Mayor Bloomberg battles the bureaucracy

PETER MEYER



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Vouchers Go Down in Utah, Charter Politics, Debating Teach For America, Milwaukee Choice, Education and Economic Growth, Paul Vallas Goes to New Orleans

CONTRIBUTORS: ERIC HANUSHEK, DALE MEZZACAPPA, JULIE MIKUTA, ARTHUR WISE, BARRY NEWSTEAD, CHESTER FINN, LUDGER WOESSMANN, CHRISTIANA STODDARD, SEAN CORCORAN, CLINT BOLICK

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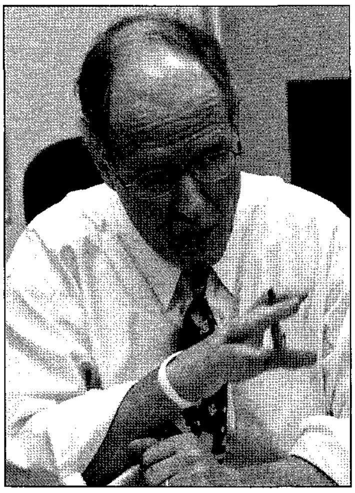

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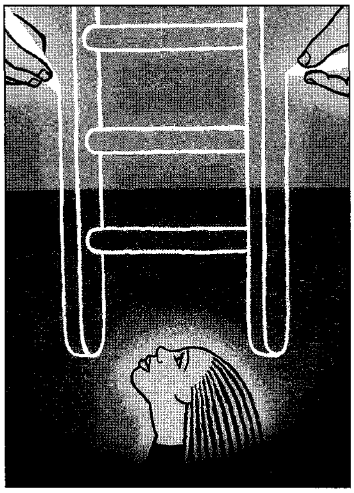

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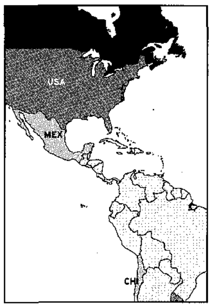

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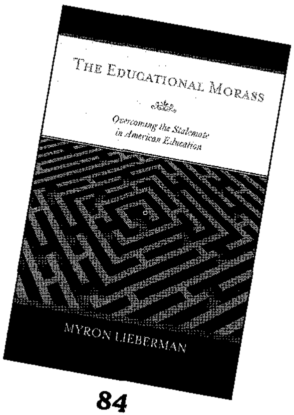

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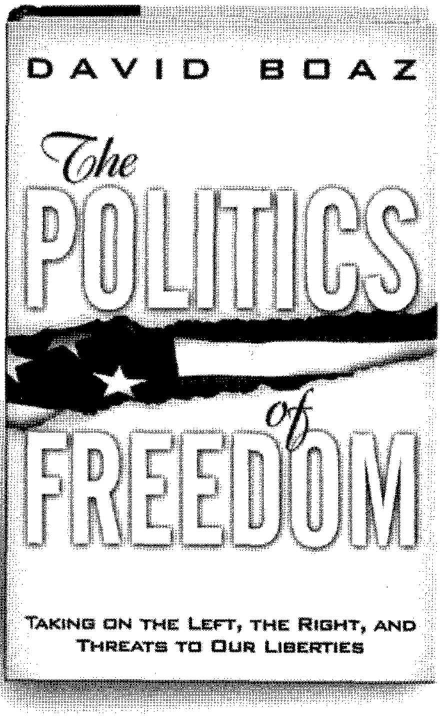
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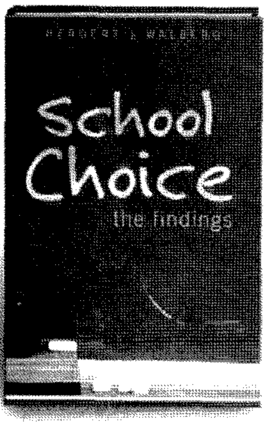
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School Choice
the findings

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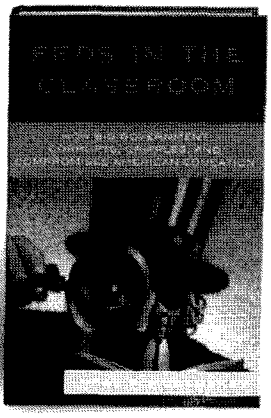
FEDS IN THE CLASSROOM

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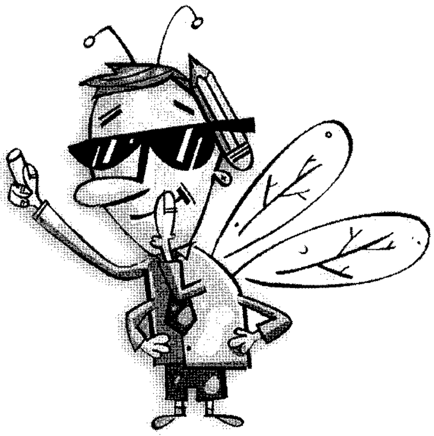

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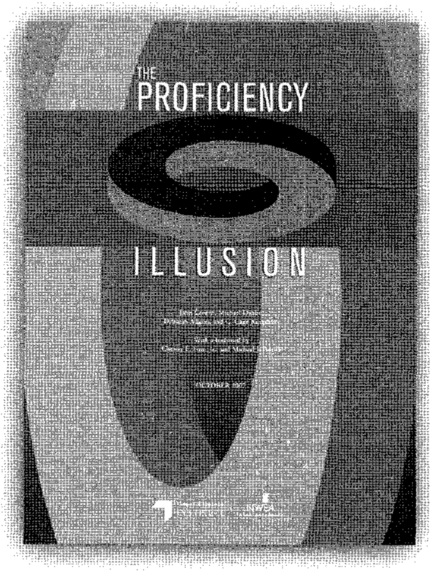

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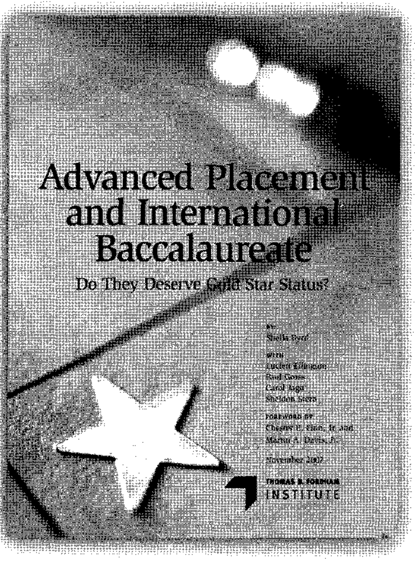

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Today's Education-Industrial Complex

Why aren't schools an issue in the 2008 election?

Candidates must worry about the present—and the present requires that one pay close attention to interest groups.

Results from the latest international tests arrived just as *Education Next* was going to press. In math and science, the United States again trailed the average international score achieved by students in the 57 test-taking nations that together comprise 87 percent of the world economy. Embarrassingly, the United States now lags behind Poland, which lifted its scores more than any other nation. Meanwhile, Finland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and our next-door neighbor, Canada, won high marks.

So why hasn't the condition of the nation's schools become a top issue in the 2008 election? Why is lagging student performance going unnoticed so far, undiscussed by candidates, questioners, and commentators alike?

In this issue, Eric Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann ("Education and Economic Growth," page 62) demonstrate the critical contribution to economic growth that good schools can make: If the United States were to join the world leaders in math and science this coming year, the country's Gross Domestic Product, within a couple of decades, could be expected to rise by an extra 5 percentage points—enough to cover the full cost of its education system.

Ah, there's the rub. Most of the economic payoff does not fall within the four- to eight-year horizon of our duly elected public officials. If a country fails to educate its young, the nation does not suffer until all those candidates are writing their memoirs or become subjects of posthumous biographies.

Candidates must worry about the present—and the present requires that one pay close attention to interest groups, especially to powerful teachers unions that pour vast sums into political campaigns. Between 1989 and 2006, the National Education Association (NEA) came in fourth among all entities contributing to national campaigns, right behind the National Association of Realtors. With the NEA opposed to meaningful accountability, genuine school choice, and anything resembling merit pay, politicians have little to gain from trumpeting reforms that might get schools back on track.

When the special interests get control of policy, the consequences can be disastrous, as the housing credit morass reveals. Realtors loved the free-flowing credit, so politicians had every reason to ignore the risks.

It was not always this way. The United States once led the world in its commitment to education. From the earliest days of the Republic, the United States invested heavily in its human capital, more so than any other nation. Those investments contributed to the extraordinary growth rate that propelled the nation to the world's pinnacle by World War II.

Around 1970, the educational-industrial complex, long under construction, was finally hammered into place. Legislatures gave teachers collective bargaining rights, the courts began instructing the schools on disciplinary procedures, regulations multiplied, the United States gained a national department of education, and state and federal dollars poured into the system.

Despite the cash flow, education itself was put on pause. Grades inflated, learning faltered, graduation rates stagnated.

Forty years later, the impact on the well-being of the country is becoming increasingly obvious. As the world becomes "flatter," the importance of human capital escalates, say Hanushek and his co-authors. The nations of South and East Asia are on the march. Corporations move operations offshore in order to find appropriately educated workers at the going price. Universities are finding it easier to recruit top-level scientists and sophisticated social scientists from abroad rather than try to grow them at home.

At least New Orleans's new superintendent, Paul Vallas, and New York's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, are beginning to address the issues (see "The Vallas Effect," page 30, and "New York City's Education Battles," page 10). After jump-starting schools in Chicago and Philadelphia, Vallas is giving new hope to the hurricane-battered city on the Mississippi. Meanwhile, Bloomberg's education boss, Joel Klein, is deconstructing New York City's educational-industrial complex, while giving merit pay, charter schools, and student accountability a chance. If Vallas, Bloomberg, and Klein have made mistakes, at least they are trying. May their spirit catch on.

— Paul E. Peterson

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K–12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

Separating Boys from Girls

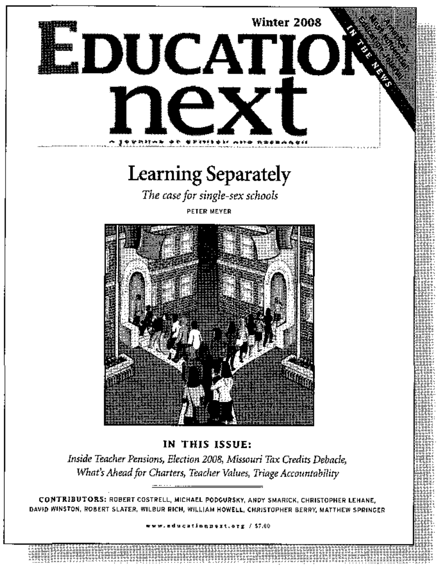
Single-sex education programs (see "Learning Separately," *features*, Winter 2008) have been operating in South Carolina public schools since 2004. Two-thirds of South Carolina's school districts offer some form of single-sex education. That's nearly 80 individual schools, with more than 40 additional schools exploring the possibility for next year.

Boys and girls in our programs learn using the same state academic standards and are held to the same high expectations. For parents, single-sex schooling offers additional choices in how they want their children educated. For students, it's a chance to be in classes without the distractions or pressures of the opposite sex. For teachers, it's a form of differentiated instruction, another way to meet the needs of their students. For principals, it's another way to improve standardized test scores and decrease discipline referrals.

Jim Rex, South Carolina's new state superintendent of education, recently hired me to help our local school districts research, plan, and evaluate single-sex programs. Everywhere I go, the idea is generating interest among teachers and excitement among parents.

Although data on South Carolina's single-sex programs are just beginning to accumulate, our standardized test scores, discipline referrals, parent survey responses, and anecdotal evidence are all pointing in positive directions. We have not yet determined if the single-sex model is the sole driver for these improvements. But when students say that they enjoy going to class, when teachers say that they "would never go back to teaching coed again," and when parents continue to sign their children up for single-sex classes year after year, the message is pretty clear. Something good is happening.

DAVID CHADWELL
Director, Single-Gender Initiatives
South Carolina Department of Education


Winter 2008

IN THE NEWS

EDUCATION next

Learning Separately

The case for single-sex schools

PETER MEYER

IN THIS ISSUE:

Inside Teacher Pensions, Election 2008, Missouri Tax Credits Debacle, What's Ahead for Charters, Teacher Values, Triage Accountability

CONTRIBUTORS: ROBERT COSTRELL, MICHAEL PODGURSKY, ANDY SMARICK, CHRISTOPHER LEHANE, DAVID WINSTON, ROBERT SLATER, WILBUR RICH, WILLIAM HOWELL, CHRISTOPHER BERRY, MATTHEW SPRINGER

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We would like to thank *Education Next* for publishing such a rich and comprehensive article on single-sex education in the United States. We at the Young Women's Leadership Foundation are always thrilled when this topic gets the attention it deserves. We do, however, want to clarify that the Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem (and its sister schools in Queens, Bronx, Astoria, and Philadelphia) are not charter schools, as some readers may have thought. Our schools are an option within the public school district for families who want to offer their daughters an all-girls, college-preparatory education.

SARAH WENDT
Director of Marketing
KATHLEEN PONZE
Director of Education
The Young Women's Leadership Foundation

School Boards

Christopher Berry and William Howell ("Accountability Lost," *research*, Winter 2008) present an interesting academic study about whether student achievement data have an impact on school board elections. What would be even more relevant to know, however, is if the candidates for school board, either the incumbents or those newly seeking office, used student test scores in their campaigning. Was the public even aware of the data? Is this a question of correlation or cause?

Perhaps the researchers might also have looked at, as a worthy comparison, whether or not city council members are held accountable for the health of the city's economy or if members of Congress are held accountable for the well-being of the nation in their elections.

I would argue that it's incumbency, in any elected office in which the public knows the candidate, that is a greater indicator of winning or losing an election. Perhaps the candidate's record on a number of issues and how he or she handled the office carries more weight than one factor—albeit the most important one—student learning.

ANNE L. BRYANT
Executive Director
National School Boards Association

Teacher Values

Robert Slater ("American Teachers," *features*, Winter 2008) draws a mystifying series of conclusions from his research on what American teachers believe. I agree that educators have struggled in recent years to separate the teaching of values from the teaching of just about everything else. And, in pursuing political correctness, we have been drowning in a sea of mediocrity, having lost our capacity to distinguish the better from the worse. Moreover, I would argue, as a colleague of mine has, that this dearth of values manifests itself most dramatically in a startling deterioration of political intelligence, the mainstay of a free democratic society.

That said, Robert Slater's data paint a portrait of those who choose to teach in the nation's public schools as the very mirror image of the culture and the educational process which has formed them... no better, no worse. He does point out that willy-nilly, parents and teachers do attempt to convey some values: the values of hard work, of doing things that we might not like, of persevering in the face of difficulty, of self-initiated effort, of listening to and respecting adults, and of meeting deadlines. Over many years, Public Agenda has conducted survey research with just about every constituency with a stake in public education. More than once, nine in ten parents have told us that the following lessons are very appropriate in public schools: "teaching honesty and the importance of telling the truth; teaching respect for others regardless of their racial or ethnic background; and teaching kids to solve problems without violence."

Moreover, parents repeatedly tell us that the people they most trust to make good decisions on behalf of their children are their children's teachers. Since trust is a commodity in short supply these days, I would urge Mr. Slater to worry less about teachers imposing their views on homosexuality and abortion on their students and more about teachers conveying what it means to grow up and become adults who understand what their responsibilities are both to their communities and to our increasingly fragile democracy. I for one do not believe that a commitment to the democratic ideal as an organizing principle depends, as Mr. Slater puts it, on "felt needs," or that preservice programs are the antidote to "help teachers develop the disposition to look persistently for ways to teach in accord with the democratic ideal."

DEBORAH WADSWORTH
Senior Advisor
Public Agenda

Pension Plans

Robert Costrell and Michael Podgursky ("Peaks, Cliffs, & Valleys," *features*, Winter 2008) make a compelling case for states to shift public pensions away from defined benefit plans to defined contribution plans. The former are ill equipped to meet the needs and expectations of today's workforce.

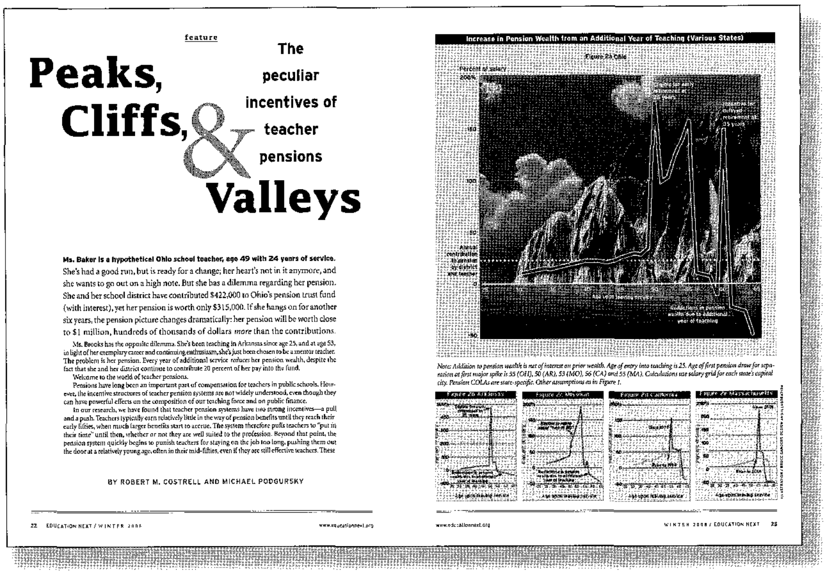
The private sector has long signaled a growing preference for defined contribution plans. News-making "freezes" of underfunded defined benefit plans in recent years (Verizon, IBM, e.g.) dealt heavy blows to a practice that reached its peak among private sector employees two decades ago.

America's prospective teachers are perhaps less likely than veteran teachers to prefer defined benefit plans. At the fall 2007 meeting of the American Savings Education Council in Washington, D.C., it was reported that members of "Generation Y" in today's workforce are more optimistic about their own abilities to save for retirement and less concerned about government-sponsored benefits than previous generations.

State lawmakers have anticipated these trends. In 1999, a national task force of state legislators drafted model legislation at the American Legislative Exchange Council's Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, to introduce portable, defined contribution plans for public employees. Since that time, 30 states have introduced versions of the legislation and 15 have adopted plans to either offer defined contribution alternatives to some or all public employees or phase out defined benefit plans altogether.

Costrell and Podgursky's call to states to reform teacher pensions is timely. Positioning teacher benefits to match the preferences of today's workforce is critical to attracting and retaining the supply of qualified teachers needed to meet the challenges we face in education. At the very least, states must offer teachers choices.

MATT WARNER
Director, Education Task Force
American Legislative
Exchange Council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Peaks, Cliffs, & Valleys

The peculiar incentives of teacher pensions

Ms. Baker is a hypothetical Ohio school teacher, age 49 with 24 years of service. She's had a good run, but is ready for a change; her heart's not in it anymore, and she wants to go out on a high note. But she has a dilemma regarding her pension. She and her school district have contributed $422,000 to Ohio's pension trust fund (with interest), yet her pension is worth only $315,000. If she hangs on for another six years, the pension picture changes dramatically: her pension will be worth close to $1 million, hundreds of thousands of dollars *more* than the contributions.

Ms. Brooks has the opposite dilemma. She's been teaching in Arkansas since age 25, and at age 53, in light of her exemplary career and continuing enthusiasm, she's just been chosen to be a mentor teacher. The problem is her pension. Every year of additional service *reduces* her pension wealth, despite the fact that she and her district continue to contribute 20 percent of her pay into the fund.

Welcome to the world of teacher pensions.

Pensions have long been an important part of compensation for teachers in public schools. However, the incentive structures of teacher pension systems are not widely understood, even though they can have powerful effects on the composition of our teaching force and on public finance.

In our research, we have found that teacher pension systems have two strong incentives—a pull and a push. Teachers typically earn relatively little in the way of pension benefits until they reach their early fifties, when much larger benefits start to accrue. The system therefore pulls teachers to "put in their time" until then, whether or not they are well suited to the profession. Beyond that point, the pension system quickly begins to punish teachers for staying on the job too long, pushing them out the door at a relatively young age, often in their mid-fifties, even if they are still effective teachers. These

BY ROBERT M. COSTRELL AND MICHAEL PODGURSKY

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Increase in Pension Wealth from an Additional Year of Teaching (Various States)

Tax Credits

I generally agree with Dr. Wilbur Rich's well-detailed recipe ("St. Louis Blues," *features*, Winter 2008) for legislative failure regarding the 2005 and 2006 tax credit proposals in Missouri. Like any good connoisseur of school politics, Rich pays close attention to inputs and outcomes. In his article, race, partisanship, and cartel politics represent the major ingredients in this recipe. As Rich adopted "the blues" as a working metaphor to explain the defeat of tax credit bills in Missouri, I have chosen "soul food" as the metaphor for my response.

Soul food is only as good as the cook and the ingredients used in its preparation. Too many cooks in the kitchen contributed to the failure of the tax credit proposals. Republican Jane Cunningham and black state representatives Ted Hoskins and Rodney Hubbard, both Democrats, were the original cooks. Missouri Democrats watered down the tax credit bills with "killer amendments," while the state teachers union and the AFL-CIO added extra helpings of sour cream and vinegar. By the time this motley crew turned off the stove, the tax credit bill had lost its flavor and its soul.

Taste determines the authenticity of soul food. In the Missouri legislative battle, no matter how many times the sponsors called their bill a tax credit, opponents convinced diners that the bills smelled like, and had the consistency of, "school vouchers." Because of the opponents' successful this-bill-will-leave-a-bad-taste-in-your-mouth campaign, few people had the stomach to support it.

Parental choice supporters nationwide should study Rich's recipe before attempting to enact a school reform law. Since I was on the frontline of a similar legislative battle in 2006, I will offer two suggestions: First, cooks and ingredients needed for this battle are not found solely on the Hill; they also must be gathered in the 'hood. Second, soul food cannot exist without intense heat. It is needed to break down ingredients to create a jazzlike harmony of taste. Similarly, parental choice coalitions must bring together a proper blend of ingredients at the right temperature to achieve success in the legislative arena. These ingredients at minimum include an adult-size serving of money, a healthy dose of bipartisanship, and organic community ownership. To win a legislative battle for parental choice, bring the fire next time.

GERARD ROBINSON
President
Black Alliance for Educational Options

Charter Wave

Andy Smarick's article ("Wave of the Future," *features*, Winter 2008) outlines a roadmap for the successful development of a system of charter schools. Currently, New Orleans is the only city in the nation with the conditions in place to follow this map to success:

- 50 percent of our city's public schools are charters
- the state, not the district, authorizes all new charter schools
- there is no cap on the development of new Type-5 charter schools
- education entrepreneurs have moved to the city en masse, and proven operators are increasing the number of high-quality charter schools in New Orleans
- key allies (Teach For America, New Leaders for New Schools, Building Excellent Schools, and The New Teacher Project) are collaborating so that their impact in New Orleans can be increased
- the state of Louisiana has one of the highest-rated accountability systems in the nation, and local leaders are committed to holding all schools to high standards for excellence.

We have the great fortune to be presented with what Recovery School District (RSD) superintendent Paul Vallas considers an "historic opportunity to bring best practices and provide school choice" to one of the country's most underserved communities. The RSD has developed more "charter-like" schools by giving autonomy to the school leaders, while still providing an appropriate level of support. In this decentralized system of accountable and autonomous schools, performance, and not politics, will drive the decisionmaking of government officials and education reformers alike.

SARAH NEWELL USDIN
President and Founder
New Schools for New Orleans

"It's Being Done"

In his review of my book "*It's Being Done*": *Academic Success in Unexpected Schools* ("Inside the Testing Factory," *book review*, Winter 2008), Nathan Glazer wonders what I would think of Tyler Heights, described in *Tested: One American School Struggles to Make the Grade*. I haven't been to Tyler Heights, so I have to go by what author Linda Perlstein has written. I would never have included it as a school where, as I say in my book, "it's being done." Tyler Heights is essentially cheating students out of an education by focusing on the need of adults to look good rather than the need of children to learn a great deal.

According to Perlstein's account, the educators at Tyler Heights misunderstand what is required in reading instruction. They have defined reading primarily as a "skill" and spend inordinate amounts of time on "reading strategies." Certainly skill plays a role in reading, particularly the skill of decoding. But once decoding is mastered, background knowledge becomes the most important factor in whether students understand text. The best way to achieve high reading scores is to provide a coherent, strong curriculum that includes all the content areas integral to education—history, science, art, music, and literature.

KARIN CHENOWETH
Senior Writer
Achievement Alliance

Free and Appropriate

Parent's wealth muddies special-education tuition case

BY JOSHUA DUNN AND MARTHA DERTHICK

On the first day of its 2007–08 term, the Supreme Court heard oral argument in a case that pitted the nation's largest school district against a wealthy entertainment executive. At issue in *New York City Board of Education v. Tom F.* was whether parents must enroll their disabled children in public schools before being eligible for placement in a private program. The Second Circuit had ruled that first participating in a public program was not required. The school district appealed.

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Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally passed in 1975 as Education for All Handicapped Children, children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education based on an individualized education program (IEP). If the public school says it cannot provide an appropriate education or if an appeals board after a hearing determines that the public program is inadequate, parents are entitled to reimbursement for a suitable private program.

Just nine days after hearing oral arguments, the Court produced a two-sentence per curiam decision based on a 4–4, but unidentified, split. The decision upheld the Second Circuit, but lacks precedential value. The tie occurred because Justice Anthony Kennedy had recused himself. While the even split might point to a typical liberal/conservative divide in need of brokering by the unpredictable Kennedy, the facts of the case suggest that the split may not be ideological.

In particular, the parent behind the case muddied it. Tom Freston, the Tom F. of the title, seemed an unlikely person to be leading a challenge against the school board. As a co-founder of MTV (Music Television Network), former Viacom executive, and recipient of an $85 million golden parachute, Freston could afford to pay for the best education for his son, Gilbert, who was diagnosed in the mid-1990s with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. However, in both 1997 and 1998 Freston sought a special education evaluation from the district.

The district created an IEP that called for placing Gilbert in a public school. Freston objected, enrolled his son in Manhattan's exclusive Stephen Gaynor School, with tuition of more than $20,000 per year, and threatened to sue. The district agreed to pay tuition for those two years, but created a new plan for Gilbert in 1999 that would have placed him in a public school. Freston sued. An appeals board sided with him, only to be overturned by a federal district court, but the Second Circuit ruled in Freston's favor. While the school district contended that the language of IDEA demanded attendance at a public school first, the Second Circuit had already ruled in a prior case that this was an incorrect reading of the law, and could unreasonably require parents either to place children in an inadequate program or shoulder the financial burden of a private education, a result it called "absurd."

Freston says that he pursued the case out of principle and has promised to give any reimbursement he receives to charity. However, his wealth seemed to trouble the Court at oral argument. Justice Antonin Scalia was particularly vexed by the idea that well-heeled families might game the system to get reimbursed for private school tuition when they never had any intention of using a public school regardless of the quality of the program.

Both the Right and the Left may have difficulty reaching a position on this issue. Conservatives could see a victory for Freston as highlighting the failures of public education and providing a back door to school choice. Or they could view it as one more entitlement that unjustifiably burdens local school systems. Liberals could be torn between their support for public education and that for disabled students and expansive entitlements. The specter of well-to-do parents working the system would give them pause as well, but to impose means testing would undermine popular support for IDEA.

Soon after the Court failed to resolve the case of Tom F., it denied certiorari in the earlier case from the Second Circuit, with Kennedy again recusing himself without explanation. This could mean that the Court as presently composed will never decide the issue, even though a conflicting decision exists in the First Circuit, which read the law differently.

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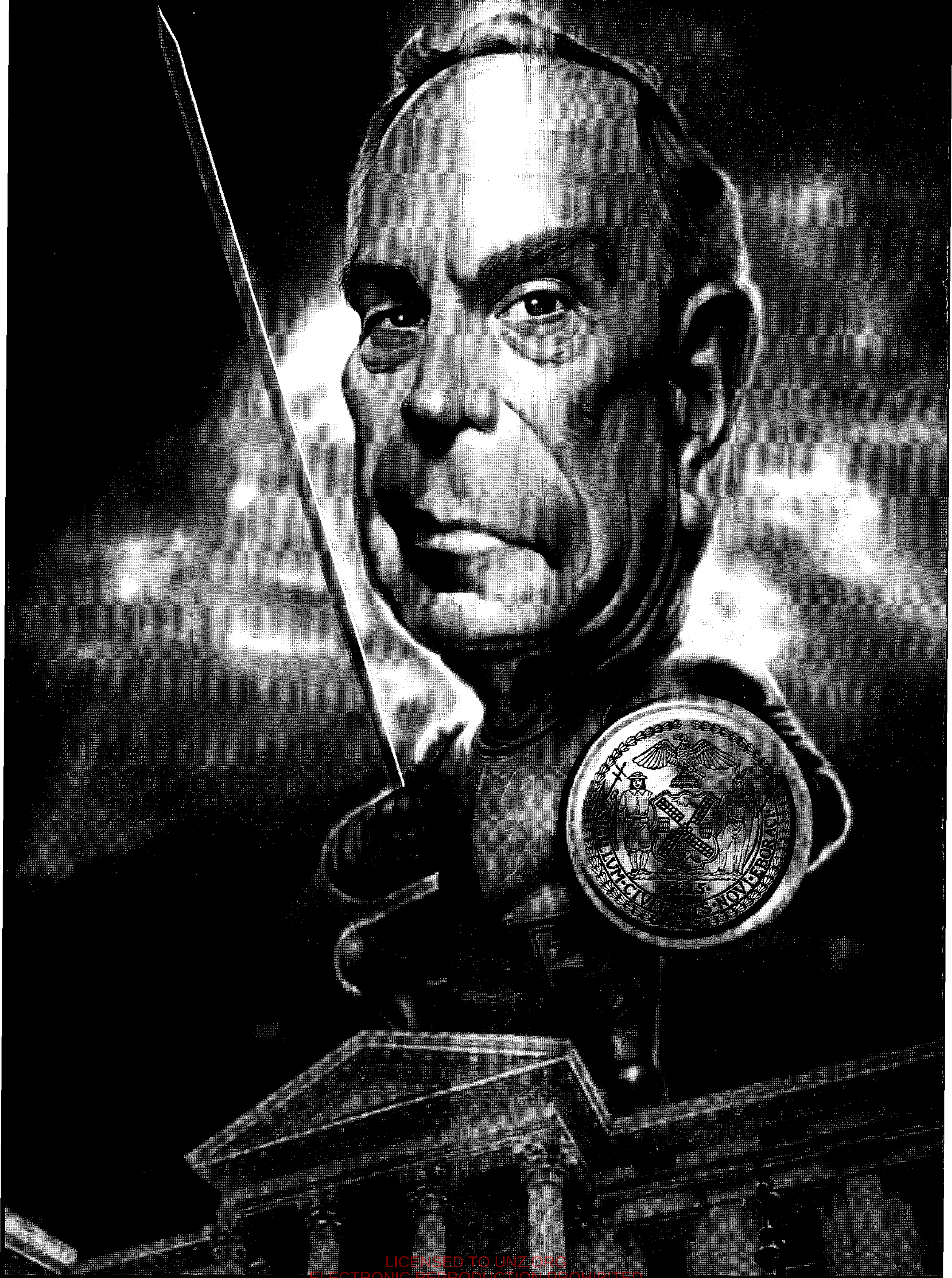
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New York City's EDUCATION BATTLES

The mayor, the schools, and the "rinky-dink candy store"

It is not easy getting an interview with Mayor Michael Bloomberg—he's a busy man. He oversees a city of more than 8 million and is thinking (or not, depending on the headline of the day) of running for president of the United States, when he isn't preoccupied with water-main breaks, terrorist threats, or the losing Yankees. Persistent requests had me cooling my heels one afternoon last fall on a first-floor bench in City Hall, with a group of garrulous, local—that's Gotham!—news photographers.

Finally, advised by Bloomberg aides to "keep it short," I was escorted into the second-floor "bullpen," the famous non-office office where the billionaire mayor holds court. The cavernous hall, once the meeting chamber of the city's Board of Estimate (the building is 200 years old), has been transformed by Bloomberg into a warren of cubicles for his 50 top aides and assorted clerical staff, with two small conference tables placed prominently on the raised "stage" at one end of the room. This is where the mayor does much of his business, including interviews with reporters.

No sooner had I settled down at one of the tables on the stage with two Bloomberg aides than the mayor appeared. A compact man in a tailored gray suit and starched white shirt, he is as short as he appears on TV (about 5'7"), but carries himself like a linebacker.

BY PETER MEYER

ILLUSTRATION / DALE STEPHANOS

LEADERSHIP

Mayor Bloomberg has made education important—hot, even. And mayors from all over the country, like Washington, D.C.'s Adrian Fenty, are visiting Mayor Mike, to see how it's done.

"Because I know you're busy," I began, "I'll dispense with my usual first question—What did you have for breakfast?—and go right to my second—"

"My favorite breakfast?" the mayor interrupted. "If I were going to have one breakfast, it would be toasted Wonder Bread with a quarter inch of Skippy Super Chunk melted on it. And then slices of overripe banana and breakfast bacon."

(When I told United Federation of Teachers [UFT] president Randi Weingarten about the breakfast monologue several days later, she too interrupted: "I have breakfast with the mayor. Did he tell you that?")

"I'm doing a story for *Education Next*," I said, attempting to get back on track, "a quarterly—"

"Um, John!" the mayor interrupted again, shouting at someone behind me. "What's all the press doing in there?"

There was a quick huddle, as another aide explained that the press was there for Shakira, who would be arriving shortly. "What on earth am I doing with Shakira?" asked the mayor, as he turned back to me and smiled. Shakira, as the New York *Daily News* put it the next day, is a "sultry Colombian singer," and was planning, according to the mayor's official schedule for the day, to discuss "anti-poverty initiatives."

It is now abundantly clear what "mayoral control" of schools means: education shares the stage with Shakira. That may be troubling to some; to others, it is important that education is even on the stage.

"It makes a difference," Seymour Fliegel, a 30-year veteran of New York City's school wars and a former deputy superintendent in East Harlem, told me recently, "that the same guy who can command the garbage trucks and police cruisers is talking about education."

It is the bully pulpit, New York–style. And Bloomberg is not afraid to use his special brand of celebrity for the cause. He has brought in Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg to help with fundraising and asked Jack Welch to help develop a leadership academy. He has made education important—hot, even. And mayors from all over the country, like Washington, D.C.'s Adrian Fenty, are visiting Mayor Mike, to see how it's done.

In a recent *New York Times Magazine* poll, 17 percent of New Yorkers said that "better public schools" (the third-highest category, just after better restaurants and safer streets) was "the best thing about New York becoming a wealthier city." Whether it's the money or the man, there's no doubt that Bloomberg, in the middle of his second term as mayor, has created such good feeling about the city that many people think he should be president.

New York, New York: Opinions Vary

"I commit to you today," Mayor Bloomberg said when the New York State Legislature handed him control of the city's schools in June of 2002, "I will make the schools better.... I want to be held accountable for the results, and I will be."

"I met with the mayor early on," says Sy Fliegel, "and I said to him, 'You want to take over the city's schools? And be held accountable for how they do? Are you crazy?'"

Whether crazy or not, it's clear that Michael Rubens Bloomberg is rich and savvy and used to getting what he wants.

With hundreds, sometimes thousands of jobs at stake, the system was more of a personal patronage mill for local politicians than a place for children to learn.

The 65-year-old Boston native, who has a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering (Johns Hopkins) and an MBA (Harvard), founded a media empire that bears his name and has propelled him to the leaderboard of America's richest: number 44 on the *Forbes* list in 2006.

Once elected, Bloomberg captured control of New York's schools and introduced sweeping changes to the nation's largest public school district, a huge, bumbling, and seemingly uncontrollable education bureaucracy of over 1,400 schools, some 80,000 teachers, 6,000 central office and regional staff, and 1.1 million students. And in 2007 the city won the coveted Broad Prize for Urban Education (worth $500,000) for raising student achievement, reducing the achievement gap, and helping greater proportions of African American and Hispanic students achieve at high levels.

Former Mayor Ed Koch calls Bloomberg "a colossus" for what he has done for the city's schools.

Poppycock, say Bloomberg's critics, a crew of education insiders, parents, and an assortment of others, including Betsy Gotbaum, the city's elected public advocate. Despite massive increases in annual education expenditures, they say, improvements in student achievement have been modest at best. And they accuse the Bloomberg team of, among other things, cooking the test score books, flooding the system with inexperienced educators, handing out millions of dollars in no-bid contracts, shutting parents out of the school reform effort, spinning the facts, not caring about curriculum, and creating such constant institutional disarray that things may just be getting worse.

Indeed, since Bloomberg took the reins of the city's school district in 2002, there have been two major organizational realignments and dozens of minor ones. One side calls this flip-flop; the other sees inspired mid-course corrections that ensure deep and systemic change.

This is where the mayor does business, including interviews with reporters.

Can the Vastness Be Conquered?

When Bloomberg gave his first State of the City address, in January, 2002, he announced his intention to seek mayoral control of the schools and abolish the infamous New York City Board of Education, which he called "a rinky-dink candy store." He joined a long list of New York mayors, educators, and business leaders who believed that the city's public school system was broken, ravaged by a generation of politics, patronage, and corruption set in motion by the bitter battle between the teachers union and the predominantly African American and Puerto Rican community in the Ocean Hill–Brownsville district of Brooklyn in 1967 and 1968 (see "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," *book review*, page 82). In the decades following, mayors had to compete with the board of education and local community boards for power. It was ugly. The seven-member board of education set broad instructional guidelines, hired a chancellor, and determined a capital budget, but the mayor decided the operational budget. Add to that mix 32 different semi-autonomous community school boards that oversaw elementary and middle schools and hired superintendents to run them. With hundreds, sometimes thousands, of jobs at stake, the system was more of a personal patronage mill for local politicians than a place for children to learn. The state legislature, which gave school districts their authority, was reluctant to dismantle an arrangement that greased so many political wheels. Bloomberg called the system "a disgrace."

It wasn't until the late 1990s that the disillusionment reached such a level that all parties realized something had to be done. A task force of state and city leaders, including the UFT's Randi Weingarten, began to meet on a regular basis. Michael Bloomberg joined the group after his election in November 2001, helping to remove the last stumbling blocks to mayoral control, in part by granting sizable pay increases to the teachers (16 percent to 22 percent, depending on seniority, over a two-and-a-half-year period).

"No mayor before him," says Weingarten, "was willing to negotiate significantly higher salaries for school teachers." She gives Bloomberg "huge credit" for getting that job done. He also, though Weingarten doesn't say this, took some of the heat off the unions, which had shouldered much of the blame for the system's dysfunction.

While the risks of assuming responsibility for education results were enormous, Bloomberg seems not to have worried about them. "I have always thought that, if you take a look at all of society's problems," he says in our interview, leaning

The Mayor v. the Unions

Who has really won in the battle with the unions? From the beginning, Mayor Bloomberg maintained what most observers viewed as a "lighter touch" in his negotiating style; and UFT president Weingarten called him "a breath of fresh air" after a post-election meeting in 2001. The teacher blogosphere lit up with complaints after Weingarten was spotted sitting in the mayor's Yankee stadium box during the 2004 baseball playoffs. Several Joel Klein hugs, including one at the Broad Prize awards, left many union members wondering about Weingarten's apparent coziness with management and a teachers' contract that conceded to shorter summers, allowed a six-period day, mandated staff development, made teachers patrol cafeterias, and weakened the grievance procedure.

"It's nice, in retrospect, for all of us to get up and say, 'Teacher salaries have gone up 43 percent,'" Weingarten says. "But two of those three contracts were knock-down, drag-out battles. They weren't easy.... What's good is that he [the mayor] sees the difference—how money matters...."

Bloomberg, the billionaire mayor, found common ground with Weingarten, the union president. The mayor achieved some work-rule changes; the union got some more money. Case in point: firing bad teachers. For years the union clung to the inviolability of tenure. Removed from the classroom for malfeasance, as many as 700 teachers would report to "work" at assigned locations, where they would do nothing, sometimes for years, while their cases wound their way through a byzantine—"Kafkaesque" is another term frequently applied—resolution process. Bloomberg won some modest concessions from the UFT in the spring of 2007, tightening up the procedures by which tenure was granted, but not on the firing question. Then in the fall, the mayor turned up the heat, announcing the formation of a special team of lawyers and consultants to help principals build cases against bad teachers. Weingarten called the plan "disgusting."

Another case in point: merit pay. The union had always opposed it. "She'd get killed if she recommended it in New York," quipped Julia Koppich, an education consultant and expert on unionism, speaking about Weingarten in 2005. Thus it was seen as "a major breakthrough" for Bloomberg when the UFT agreed to allow performance bonuses to teachers working in schools in impoverished neighborhoods. In Bloomberg style, the bonuses would be given to the schools, where four-member "compensation committees" (composed of two teachers, the principal, and a principal's appointee) would decide how to distribute the money.

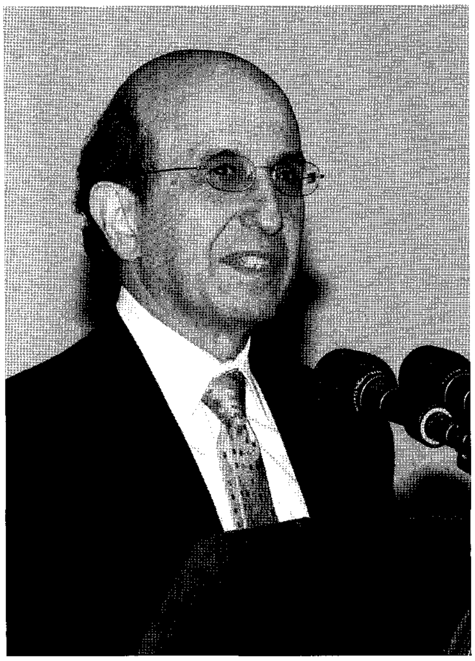
If you factor in pensions, the teachers appear to have won that round. Pending legislative approval, a 25-year veteran teacher will be able to retire at age 55 rather than 62, at 50% of her current salary, instead of being reduced to 35% as a penalty for early retirement, as it is now. This benefit enhancement is estimated to be worth almost a quarter of a million dollars to the employee.

So which side has won overall? Neither yet, and the battle is far from over.

—Peter Meyer

forward with clasped hands resting on the polished table, "they could be ameliorated or solved with better education. There is an enormous correlation," he continues, "between economic level and social problems—crime, obesity, all kinds of stuff, smoking—and economics, basically, is tied to education.

"We talk about all the civil rights," he says. "We talk about voting. We talk about the ability to be in charge of your own destiny. But if you don't have the skills to get a good job, so what?" He hesitates, but just for a moment. "If you can't read, write, do math, work collaboratively, raise a question, understand an answer—we don't do a very good job in our school system."



Bloomberg's choice for chancellor was Joel Klein, a former Justice Department antitrust lawyer and non-educator he hired in July 2002.

Taking It On

Being the education mayor, according to Bloomberg, has everything to do with management. Thus, his choice for chancellor was Joel Klein, a former Justice Department antitrust lawyer and non-educator he hired in July 2002. "It's not an education job," Bloomberg says bluntly.

But he knew what he wanted done. "We talked about the big things," says Bloomberg of his early marching orders to Klein. "Getting control of the school system and ending social promotion. Moving the headquarters from across the river over here so you could dismantle the bureaucracy. And selling that building so that our successors can't put it back together. Negotiating three contracts with the teachers union and one with the principals' union."

One thing that Bloomberg and Klein had going for them was a universal perception that the city's school system was a mess. "Intellectually, you can understand it, but until you get in and feel it, you really can't appreciate it," explains Klein. His first day on the job, he noticed a secretary with a phone call on hold. "I said, 'Why is that call just sitting there on hold?'" he recalls. "And she said, 'Well that's just an irate parent; eventually, she'll hang up.'"

With his eye on fixing the accountability system, Klein eliminated the 32 community boards and created 10 regional districts, under his direct command. He moved headquarters from the notorious 110 Livingston Street building in Brooklyn to the lavishly renovated Tweed Courthouse in downtown Manhattan, literally in City Hall's backyard.

Over the next five years, Bloomberg and Klein pushed for more charter schools (starting 45); dramatically increased the number of small middle and high schools (231 of them through September of 2007), enticing the Gates Foundation to contribute over $100 million to the effort; established a "leadership academy" (with over $70 million in private funds, including $4 million from the Broad Foundation) to train principals; and eliminated "social promotion," first in the 3rd grade and later in the 5th. They replaced the old system, launching a dramatic housecleaning of veteran education bureaucrats and firing dozens of school principals, with a tightly controlled, top-down management structure that left little to chance.

Klein's first major hire, the deputy chancellor, was Diana Lam, a veteran administrator with a reputation for improving test scores. But Lam immediately alienated some vocal education reformers, who said she got the pedagogy wrong, and some teachers, who accused her of outlandish micromanaging: for example, mandating "reading rugs" in all classrooms. It was not all her fault. Bloomberg had promised "one, unified, focused, streamlined chain of command" that included an order that "the Chancellor's office will dictate the curriculum and pedagogical methods." Lam was done in by a nepotism charge (putting her husband on the payroll) and resigned in March 2004.

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Two years later, the Bloomberg education team would change course, opening the floodgates to a wave of decentralization. If nothing else, Bloomberg has ensured that his successor "can't put it back together."

Meanwhile, thanks to a strong economy, the end of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity's long-running school finance litigation (which resulted in the city receiving over a billion dollars more per year), and increased state funding for education by the new Democratic governor, Eliot Spitzer, New York City's schools are rolling in dough: the education budget, including pensions and debt service, has soared from just under $13 billion a year in 2003 to nearly $20 billion today. Where all the money has gone will be argued about for generations, but no one disputes the fact that teachers, with double-digit percentage pay increases, have done well under Bloomberg (see sidebar, page 14).

Taking Stock

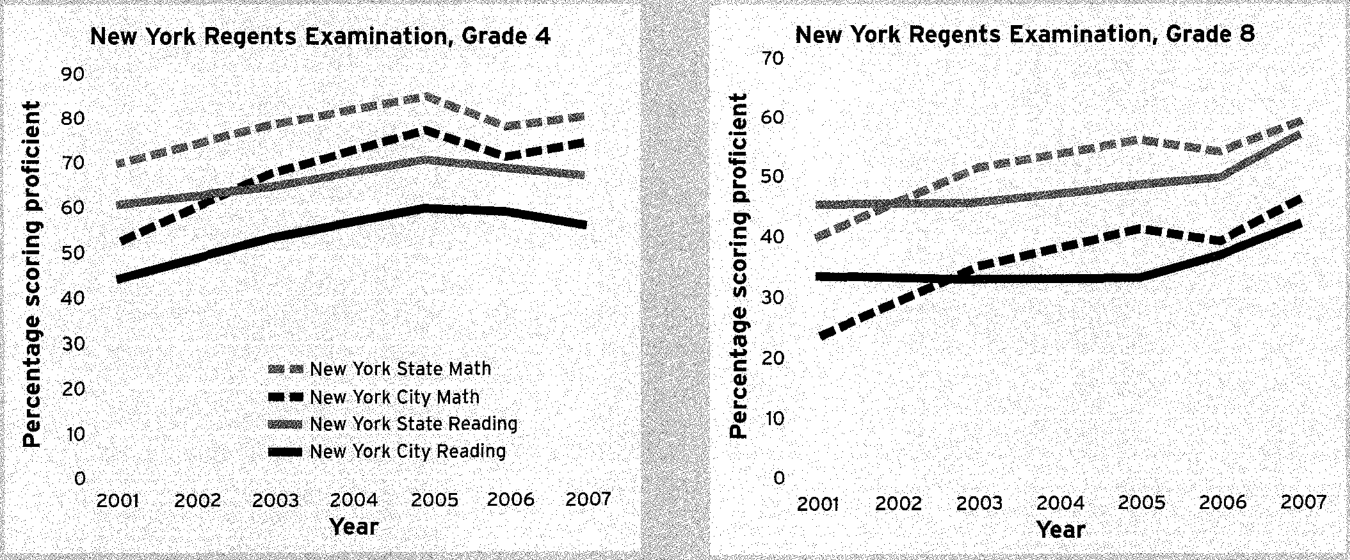
So, are New York's children getting a better education? The most heated debates have centered around test scores and instruction, class size, and the failure to engage parents and other stakeholders in the process. Two early and high-profile dissenters from the Bloomberg reforms were education historian (and *Education Next* editorial board member) Diane Ravitch and Manhattan Institute scholar (and *Education Next* contributor) Sol Stern. Both had championed the cause of mayoral control and applauded Bloomberg when he got it. Both were later appalled, first by the instructional regime introduced by deputy chancellor Lam, then by the failure to show any significant academic improvements, and, finally, for efforts, according to Ravitch and Stern, to cover up the bad news.

In one of her most controversial moves, Lam tossed out Success For All, a highly regarded phonics-based program, and replaced it with "balanced literacy," which gives greater emphasis to the whole-language approach. The city spent hundreds of millions of dollars retraining teachers and then ordered schools to devote 150 minutes of every school day to the new program. Despite the "massive effort" to make balanced literacy work, according to Sol Stern, 4th-grade reading scores actually dropped. When the scores rose 10 points in 2005, Stern pointed out, scores in other New York cities increased by the same proportions (as did those of the city's Catholic schools).

"Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein regularly trumpet their 'historic gains' in test scores," wrote Diane Ravitch in March 2007. "They say that since the

The Big Apple Test-Score Story: The Gaps between New York City and Statewide Test Scores

Both Mayor Bloomberg and his critics seek to prove their points by comparing city and state trends in student test-score performance. Each side picks certain tests and certain points in time to make their claims and counterclaims. Below are results from the Bloomberg years for both New York State Regents examinations, used for NCLB



SOURCES: National Center for Education Statistics; New York Department of Education

In one of her most controversial moves, Lam tossed out Success For All, a highly regarded phonics-based program and replaced it with "balanced literacy," which gives greater emphasis to the whole-language approach.

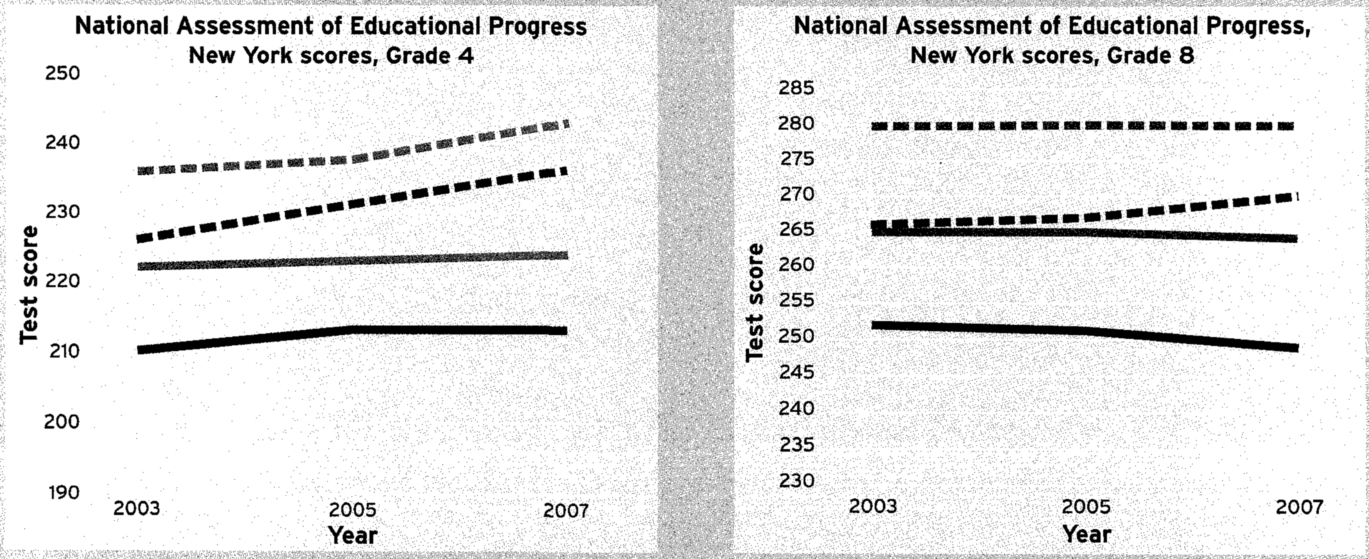
mayor gained control, scores have gone up by 12 percent in reading and 19 percent in math." Ravitch called those gains "vastly inflated" and accused Bloomberg of counting increases from 2002–03 (6 percent in reading and 15 percent in math) before he even got control of the schools, let alone implemented any reforms. Without those years, Ravitch claimed, the "actual gain" was 6.4 percent in reading and 4.2 percent in math.

David Cantor, press secretary for the city's Department of Education, dismisses Ravitch's criticism as nitpicking. He argues that it was fair to use the 2002–03 scores because "the Chancellor and the Mayor were managing the schools" during that time (Bloomberg took charge of the schools in June 2002 and Klein came on board in July) and "had already started to make changes." And even if those earlier years' scores were omitted, Cantor argues, New York student gains were "substantial—especially when compared to the gains of students in the rest of New York State…."

For Stern it seems "a classic case of unintended consequences." Mayoral control had come to mean the power "to deflect criticism, dominate the media, and use the schools as campaign props."

Are Closing in Math But Not in Reading (Figure 1)

accountability purposes, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a national test administered to samples of students in New York City and in the state as a whole. In mathematics, the city-state gap closes. In reading, the gap remains wide, as New York City students continue to parallel the statewide trend.



The billionaire mayor holds court in the "bullpen," a warren of cubicles for himself and his 50 top aides.

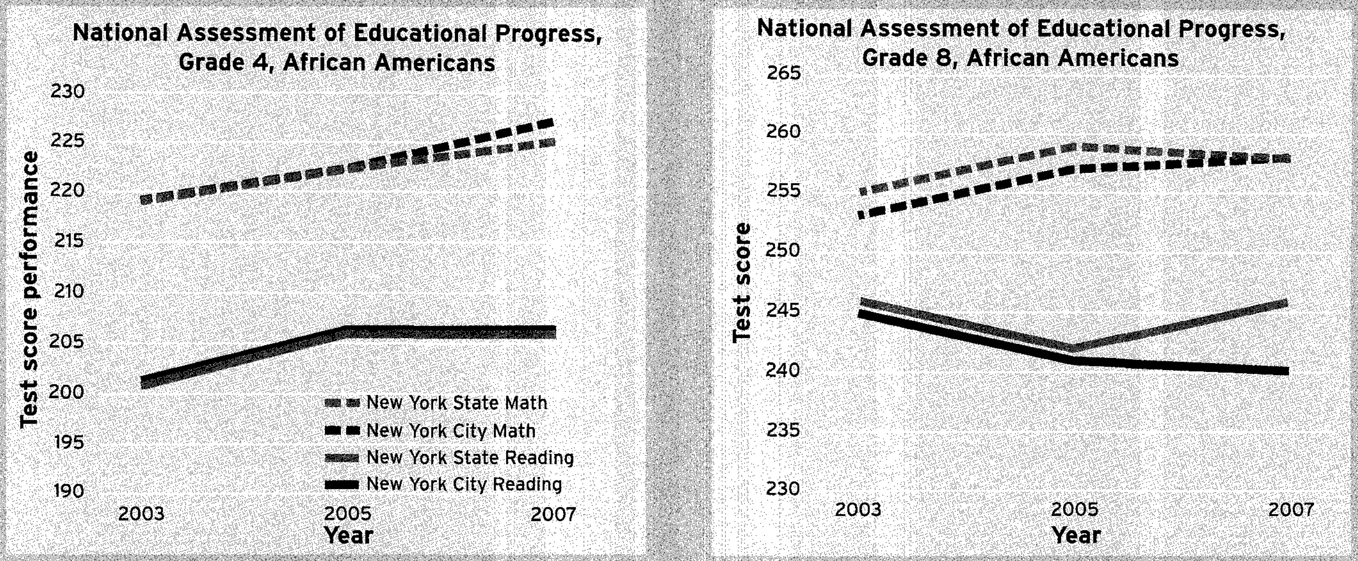
Even by 2005, as Bloomberg prepared to run for his second term, opinions on his education reforms ran the gamut. *New York Times* education writer David Herszenhorn wrote, "a picture emerges of two years of extraordinary upheaval… there are schools across the city where principals expressed optimism. At the same time, the mayor's inability so far to achieve clear-cut success, even where he had personally shone a spotlight, helps explain why many New Yorkers fail to see any change and why some say things are actually worse."

The mayor forcefully defended his education reorganization efforts and went on to win reelection by a nearly 20-point margin. Then came devolution. In what Sol Stern called "a 180-degree turn" and State Regents board member Meryl Tisch, a Bloomberg supporter, described as "jimmy[ing] around with stability and order during a time when academic achievement has not been soaring," the mayor unveiled a second "sweeping" reorganization of the schools. He said he was instituting a new rating system for schools, principals, and teachers; a new financing scheme that would get more money to needier schools; a rigorous review of teachers before granting tenure; and more principal autonomy, tied to a sharp increase in the role of private and nonprofit groups in school organization and administration.

"This is the most innovative reform in the country," says Sy Fliegel, whose private support organization (PSO), the Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association, was one of nine to receive a contract with the city to provide technical and managerial services to New York's public schools. In the second reorganization, the ten regional superintendent offices, created in the first overhaul, were abolished,

Are New York City and State Test-Score Gaps Closing among African Americans? (Figure 2)

In math, scores of New York City African American students have more than kept pace with those of their peers statewide on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In reading, the city-state gap for 8th graders has widened since 2005.



SOURCES: National Center for Education Statistics; New York Department of Education and four of the superintendents were made CEOs of new public learning support organizations (LSOs), each offering, for a price, a range of services to newly autonomous schools. Kathleen Cashin, for instance, a veteran superintendent of what had been Region 5, has formed a "Knowledge Network" that offers a "content rich" curriculum based on E. D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge system at an annual cost of $42,438 per school. Or, for $47,500 a school can sign up with former Region 3 superintendent Judith Chin's "Integrated Curriculum and Instruction" LSO and get a "thinking curriculum."

Decentralization came with an A-to-F grading system that triggered a storm of protest when the first results were released in October 2007: 50 schools got Fs and 99 received Ds. "The city's focus on student improvement is commendable," opined the *New York Times*. "But Mr. Bloomberg should ditch the simplistic and counterproductive A through F rating system."

Not all the reaction was negative. Joe Williams, former education writer for the *New York Daily News* and author of *Cheating Our Kids: How Politics and Greed Ruin Education*, counseled critics to recall how bad things had been. "It's more productive," said Williams, whose child attends a newly minted C school, "instead of being defensive about it, to talk about how you get it to a B and then to an A." And the head of the principals' union, Ernest Logan, e-mailed his members to say, "Controversy aside, these progress reports and the enormous amount of data now being collected open new doors for the CSA [Council of School Supervisors and Administrators], UFT, and DOE.

Can Gotham's Mayor Be Elected President?

Interpretations of Michael Bloomberg's record in education could soon become a national political issue. As *Education Next* goes to press, Bloomberg's aides continue to circulate rumors that the ambitious, deep-pocketed, independent-minded New York City mayor is contemplating a run for the presidency. Bloomberg himself has become a numerologist, reminding guests at a house party that 271 is the magic number of votes needed to win the Electoral College.

After the early primaries, John McCain has acquired a commanding lead in the fight for his party's nomination. But as long as the Republican party is blamed for an unpopular war and a sliding economy, he is more likely to limp than gallop into the general election. If that should make it an easy Democratic year, the tightening of the horse race between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama is inevitably pushing gender and race issues to the fore, creating divisions that may take longer than usual to heal. What should be a landslide could be a cliff hanger after all.

If the vote were split three ways, it seems just barely possible an independent could slip through. After all, Ross Perot gathered 20 percent of the vote in 1992 and he had never held political office.

True, the folks in Dayton, Ohio, and Ypsilanti, Michigan might think twice before voting for the mayor of Gotham, even if he has reform credentials. Only two mayors of any city—Grover Cleveland (Buffalo) and Calvin Coolidge (Northampton, Massachusetts)—have ever been elected president.

But Bloomberg will soon be term-limited in New York City. With all that cash on hand, why not go for the whole ball of wax? If he does, Americans might have a renewed opportunity to ponder the state of American education.

After his reelection, the mayor unveiled a second sweeping reorganization. He said he was instituting a new rating system of schools, a new financing scheme, rigorous review of teachers before granting tenure, and more principal autonomy.

We have a unique opportunity to develop solid, specific and meaningful solutions for each individual school."

Then came NAEP. In a front-page story in the *New York Times* in November 2007, Bloomberg was charged with making "no significant progress in reading and math" and "little narrowing of the achievement gap" on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). It was, as Randi Weingartner put it, "bad news."

"Shame, shame!" scolded Whitney Tilson. Tilson, a hedge fund manager and founding member of Teach For America who issues a regular e-mail newsletter about Bloomberg's education reforms, called the *Times* story "lousy" and argued that the NAEP scores showed noteworthy improvements in three of the four measures. Both Klein and the mayor defended the results. As the chancellor put it, "generally speaking," they showed "good progress." But Klein and Bloomberg were sobered. "Even though there was some progress in math scores for 8th graders, overall," said the mayor, "the results for them weren't what we would have liked them to be. And I won't make any excuses for that. As I said, the old system made excuses for failure; we're focused on achieving results. The big reason why we pay attention to test scores is because they show us where we need to make improvements."

In November 2007, Bloomberg was charged with making "no significant progress in reading and math" and "little narrowing of the achievement gap" on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). It was, as Randi Weingartner put it, "bad news."

Bloomberg's Bottom Line

When all is said and done, both the mayor and his critics are half right. Over the entire period that Bloomberg and Klein have been in office, math test scores of New York City's students have risen faster than those of students statewide (see Figures 1 and 2). In reading, however, their scores have only kept pace with those of students statewide, suggesting that the Lam reforms were misguided.

As a work in progress, Bloomberg's reforms mirror those, at least in intent, at the heart of No Child Left Behind and offer a peek at what kind of an education president Bloomberg would make.

"A key to turning around our schools has been establishing accountability," he says. "And in public schools from coast to coast, nothing has done more to establish accountability than the No Child Left Behind Act. Washington needs to do the right thing for our kids and reauthorize a strengthened No Child Left Behind Act. In our city, we've replaced a culture of excuses in our schools with a culture of performance. No Child Left Behind is achieving the same sea change on a national scale."

Would he have done anything differently? "Sure," says the mayor. "You would always do things differently. That's the thing with innovation. You don't always know how it'll work, what it'll cost, who's going to buy it. I'm not a 'would have, could have, should have' kind of guy. You learn and you move forward."

There are some who wonder whether the city hasn't just replaced one form of nonaccountability with another. Betsy Gotbaum has formed a panel to review the whole question of mayoral control. But Bloomberg just may have outsmarted everyone. The new plan—the devolution of power—comes closer to putting power in the hands of parents than anything tried in New York before. There is a healthy, and growing, charter school community (with 50 more charters allowed by recent state legislation) that, if combined with true choice and the new school evaluation process, could provide meaningful improvement in education opportunities. Apparently, many New Yorkers are still impressed. Even after the school grading program and release of the NAEP scores, a Quinnipiac University poll (November 2007) showed that, by a 47 to 25 percent margin, voters consider Bloomberg's takeover a success.

"If we leave office with the public believing that you can educate all the kids in the city," says Bloomberg about how he hopes to end his term, "that you can, in a big city, stand up to the political and labor interests and focus on every child and that they will then hold our successors' feet to the fire to do that, you really will have accomplished something great."

Peter Meyer, former news editor of Life *magazine, is a freelance writer and contributing editor of* Education Next.

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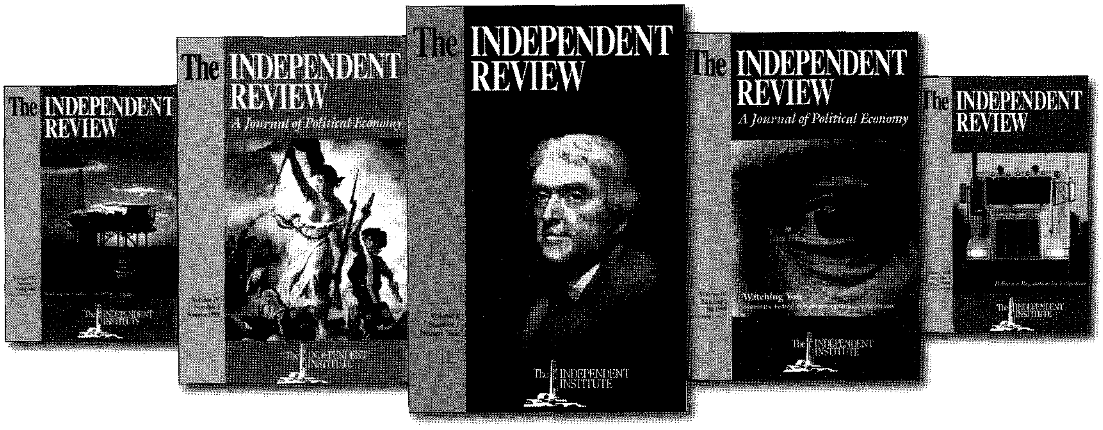

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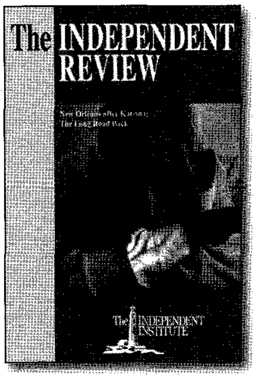

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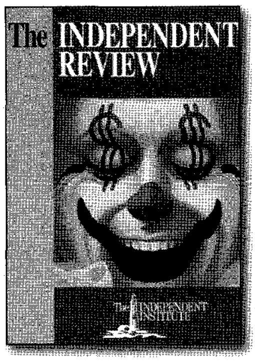

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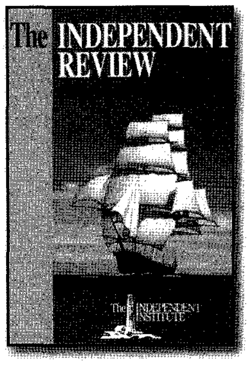

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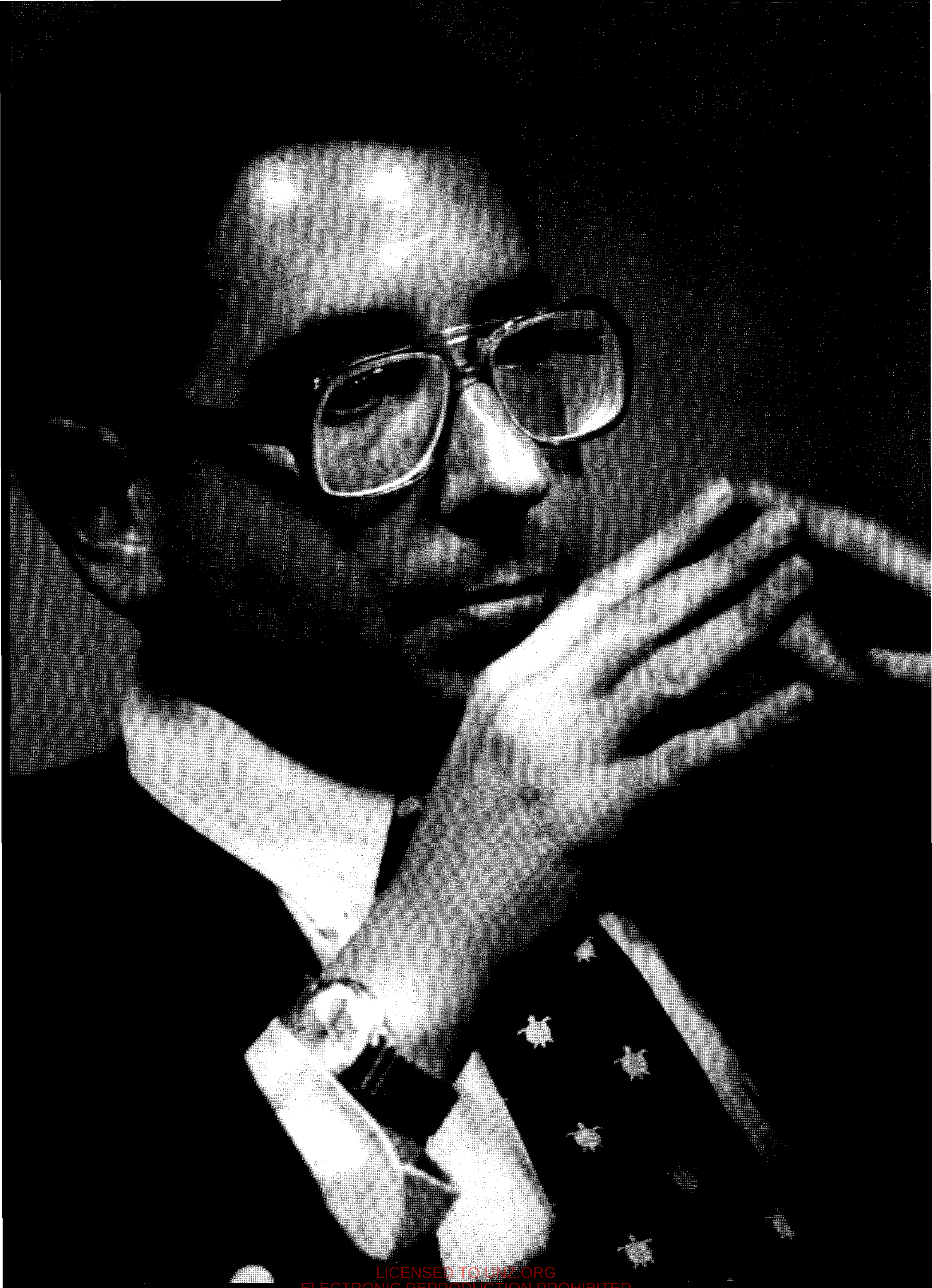


Troublemaker

The education of Chester Finn

BY CHESTER E. FINN JR.

In February 2008, Princeton University Press will release ***Troublemaker***, the memoir of *Education Next* senior editor and veteran education reformer Chester E. "Checker" Finn Jr. Currently president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, where he chairs the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education, Finn has served as assistant secretary for research and improvement at the U.S. Department of Education, professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University, staff assistant to the president of the United States (Richard Nixon), and counsel to the U.S. ambassador to India (Daniel Patrick Moynihan). He has written 15 books and more than 400 articles and serves on numerous boards.

Troublemaker weaves into the chronicle of Finn's life and career the broader history of education reform, in which he has played a vital and sometimes rambunctious role. We've excerpted some highlights here. The first part spans the early education of a "nerdy, unathletic, braces-and-glasses-wearing kid who would sometimes wake up early to read the encyclopedia" through Finn's memorable stint as a high school social studies teacher. The second part recounts some of his experiences at the Department of Education during the 1980s: working to bring the fruits of education research to America's classrooms and a professional accomplishment he views among his most important, revamping the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Excerpted and adapted from ***Troublemaker:*** *A Personal History of School Reform since Sputnik by Chester E. Finn Jr.*

I attended the Dayton public schools from kindergarten through ninth grade, benefiting from "Miss McCleary," "Miss Reynolds," and a dozen other competent, decently educated, hardworking, gray-haired women who knew their stuff, taught us well, and brooked little nonsense. They were, in fact, practiced craftspeople and consummate professionals. They commanded respect as honorable practitioners of, even experts at, a vital community responsibility. So far as I could see, they did not dwell overmuch on their own "professionalism." But neither did they belong to trade unions like the thousands of blue-collar workers in Dayton's sprawling General Motors and National Cash Register plants.

Jefferson School, into whose district my family moved when I was in second grade, was a sizable K–8 neighborhood school with large classes and unabashed division of reading groups into "blue birds" and "red birds." For me and many classmates, this yielded effective-enough delivery of basic skills and knowledge without a lot of frills. I had phonics in first grade, memorized the multiplication tables in (as I recall) fourth grade, wrote lots of book reports, and absorbed plenty of history and geography from Miss Reynolds in seventh- and eighth-grade social studies.

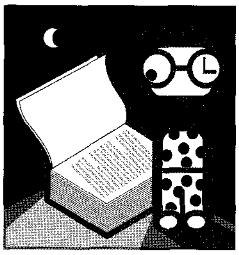
ILLUSTRATIONS / CELIA JOHNSON

Schoolwork was by no means entirely academic. We also took art, music, and gym—and boys and girls alike sampled both home ec and shop. With ample parent help, I made my share of papier-mâché dioramas, read hundreds of comic books (that's how Mrs. Scibilia rewarded kids in her third-grade class who finished their work early), and sang off-key in costumed Christmas pageants and school plays. Everyone lived within a few blocks of school, and nearly everyone walked there twice a day, going home at noon to find Mom waiting with chicken-noodle soup and grilled cheese sandwiches, then back to school for the afternoon.

In September 1958, just turned fourteen, I began to walk a few blocks farther to attend ninth grade at Colonel White High School. A standard-issue "comprehensive high school," it had something for everyone, including Friday evening football under the lights. Though the culture of the place was rah-rah, there were plenty of decent courses on offer and a smattering of first-rate teachers. You did not have to take those courses, however. One could easily enroll in a nonacademic track, and even the college-prep students could get by without much heavy lifting.

In retrospect, this Mayberry-like upbringing didn't serve everyone well. I knew that Dayton's "colored" community lived mainly on the "West Side" but scarcely noticed that the schools I attended were segregated in fact if not by law.

In 1959, I moved from Colonel White to New Hampshire's Phillips Exeter Academy, following in my dad's footsteps. On a hot September day, my father and grandfather helped me move into a tiny, stuffy, dormered single on the fourth floor of aging Webster Hall. Then, eyes welling, they said good-bye and headed back to Dayton. I didn't know a soul.



In those days, Exeter remained a boys-only institution in the classic mode of New England (and British) prep schools: jackets and ties in classroom and dining hall, six days of class a week (only till noon on Saturday, however), mandatory sports, movies in the gym on Saturday evenings (after franks and beans in the dining hall) unless there was a stilted, prearranged dance with a girls' school, bland and repetitive food (Sunday night's soup we dubbed "the vegetables of the week in review"), unbending discipline, and a sink-or-swim stance toward student performance.

In 1959, I moved from Colonel White to New Hampshire's Phillips Exeter Academy, following in my dad's footsteps.

At fifteen, I fancied myself a bold individualist, lapping up Camus, Salinger, and Elie Wiesel and thinking overmuch about the different drummer I imagined that I heard, though in reality that meant little more than heading off to the woods with a book, orange juice, and cookies on warm Saturday afternoons while others played ball.

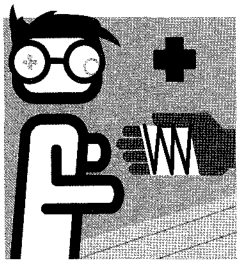
Intellectually, however, this was the most demanding regimen of my life—and I learned more at Exeter than anywhere else. By senior year, I was awakening at three a.m. most days to study. It may be that a great teacher on one end of the log and a willing student on the other are all that's needed for a world-class education. But tough standards and hard work also pay off. I was able to skip my freshman year of college thanks to AP credits earned at Exeter. Still, this blend of devoted all-around instructors, rigorous expectations, and a paternalistic education culture was not confined to upper-middle-class kids in elite prep schools. Something like it was standard practice in Catholic schools serving working-class children. And I see it working wonders today with poor and minority youngsters in the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) and other all-enveloping schools—provided, that is, that both educators and parents get past modern hang-ups about "changing the kids' culture."

College and Beyond

I entered Harvard in September (1962), continuing my privileged, parent-funded education in elite institutions and beginning what turned out to be nearly seven years in Cambridge. Arriving on campus with "sophomore standing," I had immediately to select my major: U.S. history. Studying, however, was not my top priority. Finally liberated from the discipline of home, boarding school, and (that summer) Outward Bound, I took a liking to gin-and-tonics, dated some Radcliffe and Wellesley students, and had my share of good times. But mostly what I did was volunteer. At eighteen, I was a budding social reformer.

A year earlier, Jane Jacobs had published *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. My first year of college brought *The Other America*, Michael Harrington's passionate exposé of U.S. poverty, and Herbert J. Gans's *The Urban Villagers*, documenting the human damage inflicted by urban renewal efforts in Boston's West End, just across the river. President Kennedy, after admonishing us to ask what we could do for our country, had launched the Peace Corps to help the needy in other lands. And I was ready to pitch in.

That first year at Harvard, I spent Friday evenings fetching and carrying—and bandaging and occasionally suturing—in Boston City Hospital's frenetic emergency room. I also led a group of housing-project boys in various activities one afternoon a week at an old-line settlement house in East Cambridge led by the charismatic Elsa Baldwin, a chain-smoking, tireless, compassionate socialist, community organizer, and unbending poverty warrior. The umbrella for this and more was Harvard's Phillips Brooks House Association (PBHA), the country's oldest and largest student-led volunteer organization.

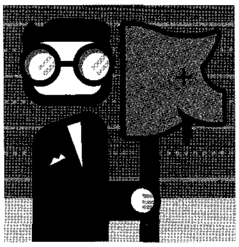


In time, I found myself heading one of the PBHA programs, then—pushing against conventional wisdom for perhaps the first time in my life—asking why we undergraduates couldn't do on our own at least as well as the professionals were doing. At Roosevelt Towers, a Cambridge housing project largely outside the purview of existing tutoring and recreation programs, a bunch of us persuaded the manager to lend us a cellar room, then went door-to-door recruiting families for an ever-expanding list of activities. We hustled grant dollars from local foundations, hired our own part-time social worker to lead "training groups" for volunteers, devised summer programs, and with all the smug self-assuredness of Ivy League youth were soon running a sizable operation.

Sometimes I even attended class. Harvard had a peerless faculty, of course, and I took some fine lecture courses from the likes of Oscar Handlin, Robert McCloskey, and Paul Freund. One day, Edward Banfield brought in as guest lecturer to his Urban Problems course a young assistant labor secretary from Washington named Moynihan to talk about LBJ's new War on Poverty—my first glimpse of the man who would become my most important mentor and teacher.

My parents expected me to apply to law school and follow grandfather and father into the family firm in Dayton. Yet that was not to be. I was seized by the passion of education tracts by Jonathan Kozol and others; Kennedy was dead (a stunningly emotional time on the Harvard campus); and Johnson had placed education front and center on the national agenda, insisting that it was the surest and most direct way to end poverty, combat urban blight, and equalize opportunity in America. That sounded like something I needed to be part of.

The summer I graduated from college (1965), I began the Master of Arts in Teaching program at the Harvard Ed School, specializing in social studies, in which field Massachusetts certified me as a secondary teacher. After a hasty summer of practice teaching, I was placed at Newton High School as a full-time intern teacher for the 1965–6 school year. Despite my previous tutoring, camp counseling, and summer classroom gigs, this was my first big solo teaching job. And I wasn't much good at it.



My four classes were part of Newton's "curriculum II," which by twelfth grade meant that my students were mostly putting in time until they could grab their diplomas and head off to work, the army, or the nearby community college. Many of the boys were bigger, and nearly all of them tougher, than I. The girls misbehaved less, but that didn't mean their minds were focused on the Problems of American Democracy course that I struggled to teach.

I came to understand that teaching is hard and that being smart and well educated doesn't necessarily mean one will be good at it.

Though "P.A.D." served as the traditional senior-year civics course, I was left to devise my own curriculum and pedagogy. Nobody much cared what, if anything, my students learned. Sometimes my classes went okay. But often as not, between discipline problems and overwrought (or underdeveloped) instructional notions, things slid off track. One memorable day, teaching *Lord of the Flies* and nearing the part where the marooned boys cut off the pig's head, place it atop a stake, and engage in a form of primitive worship, I drove to an old-fashioned Italian butcher shop in Boston's North End and bought an honest-to-God pig's head—the gnarliest, bristliest one in the store. Then I found a stick somewhere. Alas, the lesson I had planned to impart was quite lost upon these flabbergasted teenagers who couldn't stop muttering that "Mr. Finn brought a pig's head to school."

I came to understand that teaching is hard and that being smart and well educated doesn't necessarily mean one will be good at it. I also learned vividly that even the most acclaimed schools have "kids left behind," youngsters getting an inferior education while their age mates get a good one. For most of my students, I was the third consecutive "intern" teacher in their three years of high-school social studies. The education system that had served me well as a student in Dayton just a few years earlier was mistreating these kids in Newton. Someone needed to make more of a fuss about it.

Over the next two decades, Finn finished his education doctorate at Harvard; worked with Pat Moynihan on Nixon's White House staff, at the U.S. embassy in New Delhi, and in the U.S. Senate; became a Brookings fellow and a Vanderbilt professor; advised Massachusetts governor Frank Sargent and Tennessee governor Lamar Alexander; wrote several books; and was joined by a physician wife and two children. He became assistant secretary for research and improvement at the U.S. Department of Education in 1985 (see Figure 1).

Two years after *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the country was hungry for proven ways of boosting student achievement. At Secretary of Education William Bennett's insistence and with skilled leadership by OERI (Office of Educational Research and Improvement) staffers Milt Goldberg and Susan Traiman, we set out to distill reams of education research into straightforward lessons that practitioners and parents could apply. The main product was an eighty-five-page booklet titled *What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning*, the first edition of which (March 1986) contained forty-one "findings." Each laid out in plain language a robust, actionable conclusion based on multiple studies and vetted by experts in the field. In the "home" section, for example, we reported, "Children who are encouraged to draw and scribble 'stories' at an early age will later learn to compose more easily, more effectively, and with greater confidence than children who do not have this encouragement." In the "classroom" section, we declared: "Students will become more adept at solving math problems if teachers encourage them to think through a problem before they begin working on it, guide them through the thinking process, and give them regular and frequent practice in solving problems." And in the "school" section, we explained: "A school staff that provides encouragement and personalized attention, and monitors daily attendance can reduce unexcused absences and class-cutting."

Such conclusions may look obvious, even banal, but in fact it was unprecedented for the federal education research agency to treat teachers, principals, and parents as key clients, rather than targeting its products at academics and policymakers.

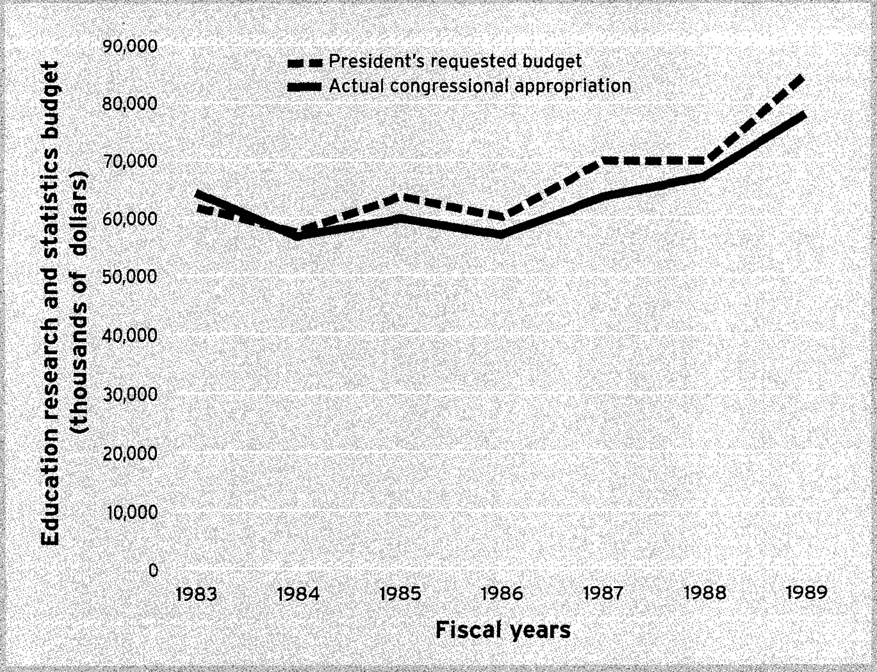
Copies flew off the shelf, more than half a million during the first year. We heard a little carping from the research community that we had "oversimplified" and a bit of whining that several findings had a Bennett tilt (such as serious talk about history and character). Mostly, though, those who examined *What Works* applauded it. The problem was that, despite all the trees and postage sacrificed to its dissemination, it had little impact on its primary audiences.

I figured this out six months later in San Diego, where I was being shown around by then-superintendent Tom Payzant, one of America's leading urban educators. He organized a lunch discussion with his high-school principals, and there, mainly as a conversation starter, I held up a copy of *What Works* and asked how many of them were acquainted with it. Only one raised his hand, and it wasn't clear whether he had actually read it.

Sobering. The lesson was not only that American K–12 education is sprawling, decentralized, and loosely coupled but also that few of its practitioners strive to "keep up with the research" (as my wife's medical colleagues might put it) and even fewer translate research results into changed classroom practice.

The Fighting Finn (Figure 1)

Bennett and Finn persuaded the White House and Congress to boost spending for the Office of Research and Improvement.



Reinventing the National Assessment

Planning for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) had commenced in the mid-1960s, spearheaded by Education Commissioner Frank Keppel and underwritten at first by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Federal funding began in 1968, and by 1972 it was entirely financed by Uncle Sam but administered via the Education Commission of the States (ECS). The assessment itself was first given in 1969, but the underlying political compromises meant that (a) students were tested by age, not grade level; (b) results were reported either as percentages of test takers getting individual questions right or (starting in 1984) on a psychometric scale that included no benchmarks, standards, or "cut points"; and (c) the "units of analysis" were the entire country and four big regions but not individual states, let alone districts or schools. Though nicknamed "The Nation's Report Card," in reality NAEP's reports were none too informative.

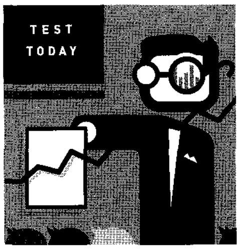
By the mid-eighties, the country craved more and better achievement data, and the governors, in particular, wanted comparative performance statistics for their states. So we decided to appoint a blue-ribbon panel of our own to examine NAEP and recommend changes. Lamar Alexander, then in his last year as Tennessee's governor, agreed to chair it so long as someone else did the heavy lifting. Tom James consented to play that role. The National Academy of Education (NAE) agreed to house the project. Several major private foundations (including Exxon, Ford, Hewlett, and MacArthur) were persuaded to cover the costs, and a terrific cast of twenty-two individuals agreed to serve, including Hillary Rodham Clinton, then the first lady of Arkansas; Stanford professor Michael Kirst; and California schools chief Bill Honig.

Bennett announced the NAEP "study group" in May 1986, and ten months—and forty-six background papers and nine subgroups—later its report was released.

Education secretary William Bennett with his newly appointed assistant secretary for research and improvement (1985)

Four of the panel's recommendations were key to NAEP's future utility:

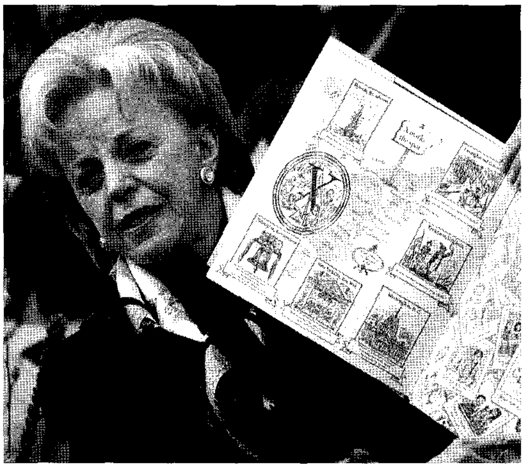
- Student achievement should be sampled and reported at key "transition grades," namely fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades, in addition to age levels.
- More subjects should be assessed, spanning the curricular core.
- A diverse, bipartisan, and independent board should be appointed to oversee NAEP policy, "buffered from manipulation by any individual, level of government, or special-interest group in the field of education."
- Achievement should be tallied and reported for states (and cities) as well as the whole country.



State-level NAEP reporting elicited mild concern from the NAE reviewers, who fretted that undue attention might be given to an Olympic-style ranking of states on the basis of their scores and insufficient heed paid to the "many factors" that influence such scores. The reviewers also added a suggestion of their own, that in "each content area, NAEP should articulate clear descriptions of performance levels, descriptions that might be analogous to such craft rankings as novice, journeyman, highly competent, and expert. Descriptions of this kind would be extremely useful to educators, parents, legislators, and an informed public."

Lynne Cheney and Chest Pains

In 1986, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administered its first-ever assessments of U.S. history and literature to a nationally representative sample of eleventh graders. This was underwritten by a special one-time grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), made while I was at Vanderbilt and William Bennett was NEH chairman. Diane Ravitch and I had persuaded both the mandarins of NAEP and the Bennett NEH squad that it was crucial to find out just how much high-school juniors did or did not know about these two key subjects and that a NAEP add-on could accomplish this. Diane and I helped design the assessment and recruit the subject experts who assisted the Educational Testing Service in crafting suitable questions. We also hoped to write a book about the findings, though the data themselves would be in the public domain.



By the time the test results rolled in, I was working at the Education Department and Bennett was secretary. His NEH successor was Lynne V. Cheney, a strong-willed woman, author, and humanities booster, as well as Dick Cheney's wife.

Using the not-yet-released NAEP data, Diane and I wrote *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* which Harper & Row published in 1987. (As a federal employee, I took no royalties from its sales.) Cheney penned the foreword, accurately if mildly noting: "The results...show that while a few students did very well, most did not perform satisfactorily."

In fact, the assessment results were a devastating indictment of U.S. high schools. A third of test takers failed to identify the Declaration of Independence as the document marking the formal separation of the American colonies from Britain. Presented with a timeline, fewer than three in five placed World War I in the correct fifty-year period. (A majority could not do that with the Civil War.)

As our book publication date neared, Cheney was completing her own NEH report, *American Memory*, a competent critique of the schools' failure to transmit knowledge of the past to U.S. youngsters. Seeking to maximize its impact, she elected to scoop Diane's and my book, scheduled for release a few days later, and put some of our major findings and choicest examples into her booklet.

The data, to be sure, had been paid for by the NEH, which Cheney now led, and in time would be available to all. Still, this scramble to get out ahead of us was, if not dirty pool, at least inconsiderate and offensive. Ravitch and I were mightily irked, and a prominent TV journalist dumbfounded Cheney by asking her on a national interview show if she had "plagiarized" from our book.

It was a stressful time for all concerned, the more so since NEH attorneys—possibly to cow me—were also questioning whether it was kosher for me to have used government typewriters and phones for my part of the book writing. And so it happened, one morning at the office, that, for the first time in my life, I felt chest pains. My wife the doctor instructed me to get out to the Walter Reed emergency room ASAP and she would have the cardiology team waiting. Just as assistant Patty Hobbs and I were walking out to my car, however, the phone rang. It was an irate Lynne Cheney, saying we have to talk about this problem and resolve it right now. I was too proud to tell her that I was having chest pains that she might have caused, so I drummed up the hasty excuse that a "family emergency" prevented me from talking with her right then. She didn't want to hear it, but I promised to call her back shortly.

At the ER, Walter Reed's top cardiologists quickly determined that whatever had caused my chest to ache was not a heart attack but insisted on following their standard protocol and keeping me overnight for observation. As orderlies wheeled me off on a gurney toward the ward where I would repose till morning, I said "Whoa, I need to make a phone call." I dialed Cheney's office and, still loath to tell her what had happened or where I was, made a date with her to talk about it all a day or two later.

Lynne and I have been on a dozen panels and seminars together in the years since. Today we enjoy a proper though tepid relationship, warmed slightly by the fact that our basic education values are similar. And I've had no more chest pains.

Secretary Bennett embraced all these recommendations, declaring in March 1987 that he "certainly intend(ed) to move forward with legislation and to seek authorization to put an improved report card into the nation's hands."

States would not be required to take part in NAEP, but Bennett predicted that most would. "There is very great public interest," he remarked, "in this question of 'How are we doing? What are our children learning?'"

The Alexander-James report, combined with the NAE's qualified endorsement, Bennett's zeal, and a parallel proposal from the Council of Chief State School Officers to use NAEP as the vehicle for state comparisons, amounted to a sea change. Its recommendations symbolized both a coming of age for American education—a real readiness to confront and compare school outcomes—and an essential foundation under the standards-based reforms to follow.

Few objections were voiced at first. Albert Shanker commented that while revamping NAEP didn't top the education lobbies' agenda for the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) reauthorization cycle then under way, strengthening the assessment system was "one of the most important things we can accomplish in this round" of federal education legislation.

At the end of 1987, both chambers passed their respective ESEA bills. The House version paid scant heed to NAEP, but the Senate incorporated nearly all of the Alexander-James recommendations. How that happened illustrates the kind of backstage bipartisanship and teamwork that's still occasionally possible in Washington.

Massachusetts Democrat Edward M. Kennedy chaired the Senate Education and Labor Committee in the 100th Congress. His chief education staffer at the time was an old friend and coauthor of mine, Terry W. Hartle (now senior vice president of the American Council on Education). He and I worked closely and quickly behind the scenes to massage the recommendations into a legislative form that both Kennedy and the Reagan administration could endorse. Kennedy then became Senate champion for the NAEP reforms.

The sledding got a bit rougher when Senate and House versions of ESEA met in conference in early 1988. A lobbyist for the National PTA declared, "This bandwagon of testing is getting ridiculous," and the American Association of School Administrators (the local-superintendents' group) complained, "The marginal good to educators of comparing data across state lines, compared with the cost, is not much."

When the ESEA reauthorization was finally signed into law in 1988, near the end of the Reagan administration, its NAEP amendments did much to pave the way for standards-based, results-driven education reform. If I were clobbered by a bus tomorrow, this reinvention of NAEP would be among the very few public-policy accomplishments that I wish someone might think to put in my obituary. It was also proof that even in Washington one can sometimes effect worthwhile change by sticking with a project, winning others over to it, and gradually building momentum behind it. ■

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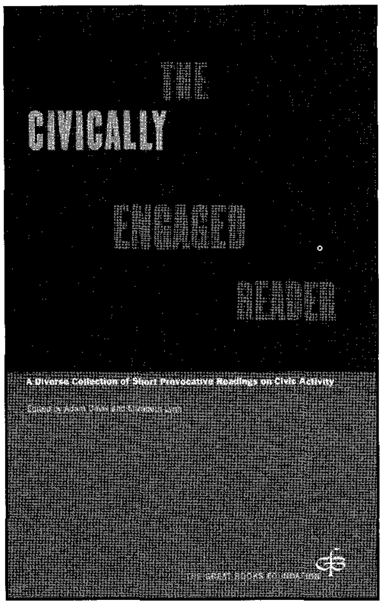
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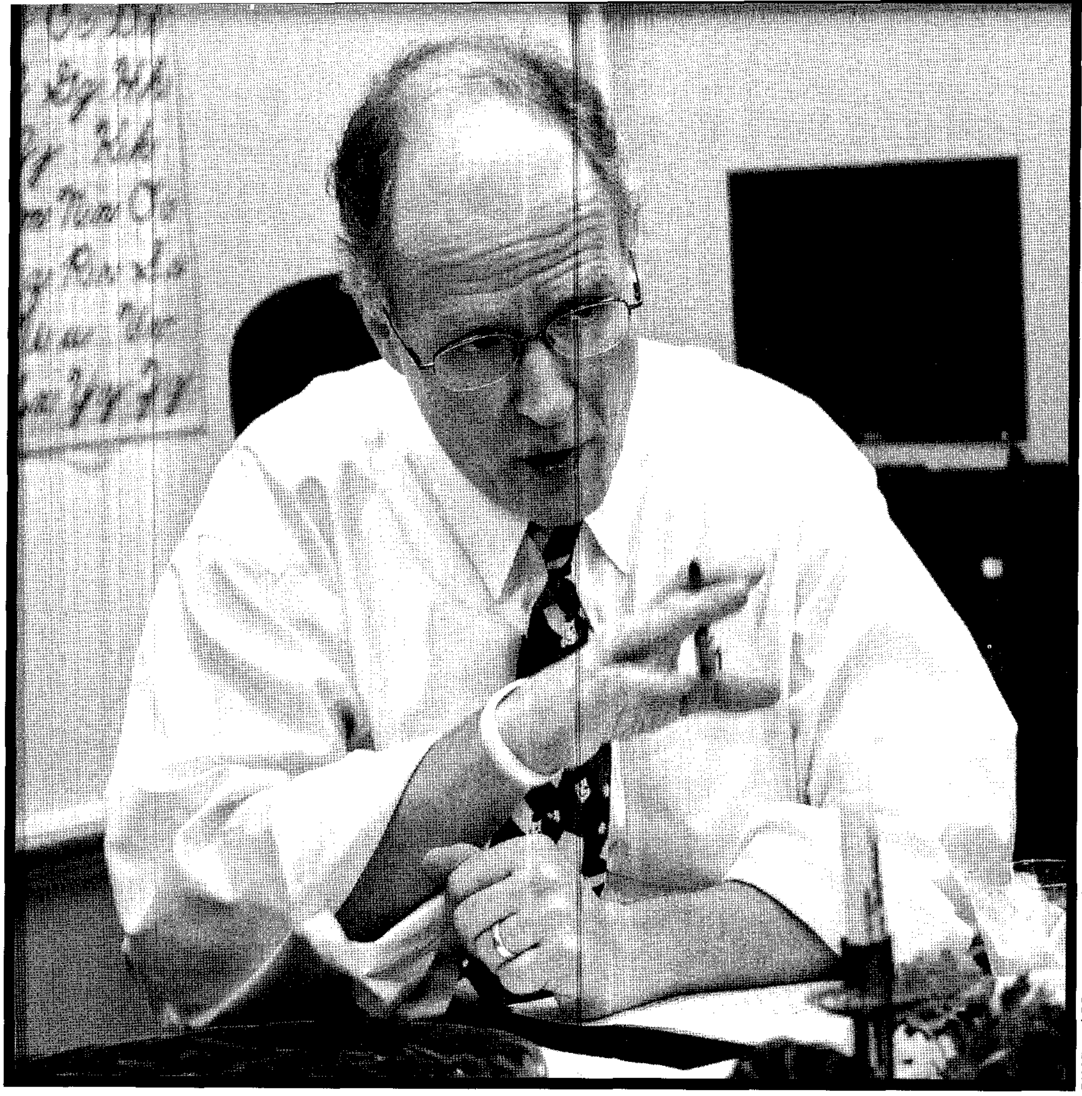

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The Vallas

The supersized superintendent moves to the Superdome city

Effect

By DALE MEZZACAPPA

The 14-year-old in the discipline school, let's call him Kareem, was having a bad day. He'd gotten into a food fight, and he was in big trouble. He didn't want to face the principal and whatever punishment was going to be meted out. So he walked out of the school, at 26th and Jefferson streets in pockmarked North Philadelphia, trekked for nearly two miles through some of the city's most dangerous streets, and presented himself at the front desk in the blond brick headquarters of the city school district.

"I want to speak to Paul Vallas," he announced.

The perplexed guards called the head of the district's alternative schools office, a woman named Gwen Morris, who had worked in the system for more than three decades and before that had been a Philadelphia public school student herself.

Morris and a few other Vallas aides called the student's mother and the school principal and efficiently sorted things out. But the boy kept insisting: he wanted to speak to Vallas.

Morris has seen way too much to be easily impressed by the putative saviors who come and go in urban schools. But she still sounds amazed when she tells this story. Even in the fog of his often troubled life, Kareem had heard of Vallas. He knew this building as the place where Vallas worked. And he had absorbed the gist of what Paul Vallas is reputed to be able to do: solve problems in urban schools. Make things better.

Little things. Big things. Of the cadre of non-educators—business leaders, military men, government officials, lawyers—who have been called on to transform large urban school districts in recent years, Paul Vallas has been at it the longest and, in the minds of many, is the one with the best track record. Since 1995, he has tackled the third- and eighth-largest districts in America—Chicago and Philadelphia. Both of them are old-politics big cities with school systems long steeped in racial tensions and marked by tough unions, deteriorating buildings, and white and middle-class flight. Intensifying poverty and racial isolation accompany escalating demands for better student outcomes.

Vallas lasted longer in both Chicago and Philadelphia than most urban school leaders, six years in Chicago and then five in Philadelphia, but he wore out his welcome in both places. He left the Philadelphia district in many ways transformed, most agree for the better, but still with a sour taste and a big deficit. While he won converts among longtime district staff for his energy and commitment, he alienated the people who hired him; things had become so bitter that he didn't show up for his own sendoff. A similar thing happened in Chicago, where Mayor Richard Daley, who had installed him to clean up what had been described as the worst school district in America, eased him out after he had done just that.

The saga of Paul Vallas, to hear him tell it, is one of too much success.

"What happens with turnaround superintendents," he said, "is that the first two years you're a demolitions expert. By the third year, if you get improvements, do school construction, and test scores go up, people start to think this isn't so hard. By year four, people start to think you're getting way too much credit. By year five, you're chopped liver."

But Vallas has little time for reflection or looking back. He is focused on what may be his biggest challenge yet as superintendent of the Recovery School District (RSD) in the ruined city of New Orleans.

The powerbrokers in New Orleans are thrilled to have him. "He has vision, he has shown us what we can have, what can be accomplished," said Penny Dastugue, a member of the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, or BESE, which runs the RSD. "He's really brought hope to so many and promise, and he delivers. He's created buy-in from all parties, and that's never existed in this city. We've been so divided along racial lines, along neighborhood lines. He's been able to take us all above that and help us see what needs to be done. This is the first time I've been hopeful for the city and the children."

The Philadelphia Story

Depending on whom you talk to, Paul Vallas is either a loose cannon or a genius; he is, in fact, a combination of the two. His energy level is boundless, his temper legendary, his gangly charm equally so. His style of leadership, the "Vallas treatment," is by now well established. Do things big, do them fast, and do them all at once.

He arrived in Philadelphia in the summer of 2002, after a difficult, contentious year in which the state took over the city school district, declaring it bankrupt financially and academically. The governor at the time, Republican Tom Ridge, and the state legislature had been at war with the previous superintendent, David Hornbeck, over the adequacy of funds sent to Philadelphia.

In fall 2001, with the help of some city Democrats interested in more school choice, the legislature disbanded the Board of Education and installed the School Reform Commission (SRC), dominated by gubernatorial appointees and led by an African American Swarthmore businessman named James Nevels. Along with the takeover came a $317 million bond to help the district get back on sound financial footing and $75 million in extra operating funds.

So far, the powerbrokers in New Orleans are thrilled to have Vallas in town.

Harrisburg was clear on its favored reform strategy: make Philadelphia a showcase for the private management of low-performing schools. Ridge initially had wanted Edison Schools to run up to 70 low-performing schools in the district and operate the central office under contract.

But Nevels and later the full SRC balked at turning over the management of the district to Edison and at giving all the $75 million in extra state money to private providers. In its first year, the SRC began the process of assigning 45 schools to private providers, Edison and other for-profits as well as some nonprofits, while searching for a new CEO.

When they got Vallas, he immediately began putting his stamp on the "diverse provider" model. He added universities to the mix of school managers. He said he wanted $50 million of the new state money for his own reforms.

"I told them I wouldn't take the job unless I could get [extra] money for the non–privately managed schools," he said. As a result, the private managers were left with less than they expected in extra funds to implement their programs, and the all-out experiment originally envisioned by the proponents of privatization there is not what happened.

Using the bond money as a cushion, Vallas began building brand-new schools and doing major renovations on old ones, something that hadn't happened in decades. He got rid of most middle schools, converting the entire district to a K–8 and 9–12 grade structure. He instituted a standardized curriculum for all subjects and grades. He created afterschool programs, Saturday school, and summer school, the running of which was mostly outsourced to private companies like Kaplan and Princeton Review.

He doubled the number of children in preschool and reshaped the high school landscape. When he started, there were 38 public high schools in Philadelphia with an average enrollment of 1,700. When he left, there were 62, including charters, with an average enrollment of 800; half have fewer than 500 students. One in particular is a monument to his vision, the spectacular School of the Future, a technologically dazzling building designed with Microsoft that serves one of the poorest areas of the city.

Vallas expanded Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, often in areas more known for gang warfare than academic achievement, while setting up more disciplinary schools and alternative schools for overage underachievers, which were also contracted out to private providers.

Personally, Vallas was all over the place. At SRC meetings, parents who were used to being politely thanked after their carefully timed three-minute speech suddenly found themselves with Vallas at their side getting more information on their complaint. Many mornings, he hung out at schools and talked to parents, teachers, and students as they arrived. At night, he went to neighborhood or church gatherings.

Everywhere, he carried a small notebook and wrote down what people told him. Back in the office, he'd tear out each page and hand it to a cowed aide for attention. Today. Immediately.

"It was on some levels a really wild ride and the best thing that ever happened to the city," said Ellen Savitz, a veteran district educator who found herself in the twilight of her career with the chance to create five brand-new small high schools, including the School of the Future. "He came into a system where, oh my God, you figured you have to move out when your kid is old enough for school, things are so bad. And he came in full barrel and said, 'We can do better.' And he proceeded to do it."

Teacher recruitment stepped up. Almost all new hires were certified, compared to just three in five when he took over, and more of them stayed beyond their first year. Test scores went up more or less steadily, especially at the elementary level. In 2002, 29 percent of students were advanced or proficient in reading and 19.5 percent in math on the state achievement test, the PSSA. In 2007, 38 percent of students scored at the proficient level in reading, and 41 percent did so in math.

More schools met federal achievement goals. At the start of the Vallas era, just 26 of the district's 200-plus schools made Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind. By the time he left, that number had increased to 166.

It is an impressive record, but his endless array of new programs and initiatives exhausted not only those around him, but the district's available resources as well. In the beginning, nobody was too concerned about the way Vallas was spending money. He had been the director of the Illinois Economic and Fiscal Commission, the state legislature's budget arm, and the revenue and budget director for the city of Chicago. He was energizing everyone around him, and he kept presenting budgets that he said were balanced.

"Early on he decided, no guts, no glory," said Cecilia Cummings, who served as Vallas's chief communications officer. "He was going to go for broke."

But for some, "going for broke" meant exactly that: driving the district into deficit while failing to follow up with a serious look at what was working and what wasn't. In Philadelphia, he outsourced a multitude of services, with little qualm

> ***"Early on he decided,*** no guts, no glory," said Cecilia Cummings, who served as Vallas's chief communications officer. ***"He was going to go for broke."***

and minimal oversight. In the end, the district had run out of money and had no idea exactly what was responsible for the successes. Parent activists, who both appreciated Vallas and were wary of him, and who clashed philosophically with Whelan and the SRC over reform strategies and privatization, nevertheless came to a similar conclusion. They were concerned too that while test scores were going up in the lower grades and students had more high school choices, 11th-grade scores were still abysmal and the dropout rate, close to 45 percent, hardly budged.

Vallas lobbied for more money from the city and the state, and was only partially successful. "He believed if we could show results, that investment would follow," said Cummings. "And I think that was his big disappointment and unfortunately his greatest failure, in assuming that the investment would follow."

The SRC lobbied some as well, but didn't go to the mat on the question of whether the district was under-resourced by the state and city. Gradually, Vallas's persona and his initiative-a-day approach began to grate on its members.

"Vallas came in with a lot of promises, a lot of unfocused activity," said Dan Whelan, the retired chief executive officer of Verizon Pennsylvania who served for five years on the SRC and started out as an enthusiastic supporter. "He had a can-do attitude with a cure for every problem, all of which provided hope for a time. However, in the end he didn't deliver sustainable change in some very fundamental areas." Whelan said that while shaking things up, Vallas did little to change a system culture that tolerated lax spending habits, duplication, and absenteeism.

"The deficit I left on paper was ***$40 million.*** The deficit I inherited was ***$160 million,***" he said. "***And look at all we did.***"

Vallas attends a house party hosted by Edison Schools.

The Breakup

For sure, Vallas is not a bottom-up, capacity-building sort of person. There was no succession planning. He failed to cure many systemic ills. While for most of his term he got along with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, he really didn't move the famously intransigent union on many important issues. Teacher pay for performance, for one. The U.S. Department of Education gave the city a $5 million grant to work out a pilot project, but after months of fruitless negotiations with the union, the district gave up and used the money instead for charter schools.

The beginning of the end of his tenure happened when, just four months after he had told the Philadelphia City Council that the budget was balanced and a month after the SRC, by a 3–2 vote, had renewed his contract until 2010, the district suddenly was revealed to have a $73 million deficit.

"I think Paul relied on the finance team, and the finance team was telling him all along he was spending too much, and he was constantly getting them to stretch the buck, be more creative," said Fred Farlino, who came out of retirement to be the district's chief operating officer for part of Vallas's tenure.

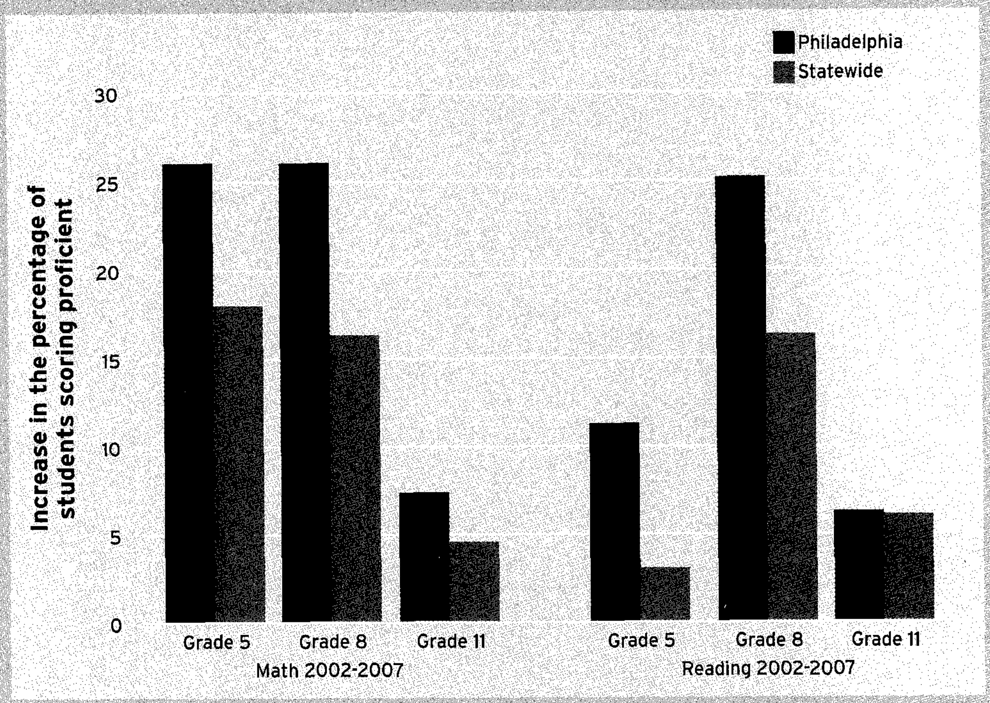
Vallas, said Farlino, "would absolutely stretch it to where it won't stretch any more. That's what he was good at, and he drove people crazy, but when you looked around, and saw how he was transforming the district, you'd say, maybe Paul's right, maybe I'm stuck in the mud."

Embarrassed SRC members, led by Whelan and James Gallagher, the president of Philadelphia University, pushed for Vallas's ouster. In the spring of 2007, they took him to lunch at the Four Seasons Hotel and told him that they had lost confidence in him. Nevels, until then a Vallas ally, took their side.

Governor Ed Rendell, a Democrat and former Philadelphia mayor, fought hard to have Vallas stay. "Paul was successful in implementing a menu of strategies aimed at boosting academic achievement, and extraordinary strategies that involved huge organizational change to occur simultaneously," said Donna Cooper, Rendell's policy chief. "The standardized curriculum, technology, a robust alternative education pipeline, a culture focused on student scores, closing the teacher shortage, creating new high schools. His gift is

Five Good Rounds in Philly (Figure 1)

With Paul Vallas at the helm, Philadelphia's gains on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams significantly outpaced gains statewide.



SOURCE: Pennsylvania Department of Education

successfully implementing numerous strategies at once at a very deep level. A lot of people can say what they want to get done. Paul actually got a lot of it done."

But after the spring lunch meeting, Vallas had had it. Los Angeles had wooed him and then the offer came from New Orleans. He told Cooper and Rendell that he was out.

Even now, though, Vallas will say that Philadelphia's budget woes have been overblown, primarily caused by a few bad breaks in the last fiscal year: more retirements than expected that caused a large one-time benefit payout, failure to sell a school building, a delay in state reimbursement for some funds. "The deficit I left on paper was $40 million. The deficit I inherited was $160 million," he said. "And look at all we did."

Vallas has no time for criticism that he tried to do too much, too fast. "Look," he said, "I don't know what that means, juggling too many balls at once. That's how we get the type of growth we get; you can't focus on one thing. Our kids have multiple problems that need multiple solutions, not a magic bullet, but a cocktail."

If that "cocktail" needs to include programs to address students' out-of-classroom needs, so be it. You won't find Vallas philosophically debating the issue of whether schools can reasonably be expected to succeed academically in desperately poor areas before the issues of poverty are addressed.

Nor will he philosophically defend choice and privatization over other strategies, although he says he felt the diverse provider model in Philadelphia was a success, albeit compromised by the decision made by the SRC before his arrival to make the companies work within the existing teacher contract and other rules under a so-called "thin management" arrangement.

"The EMOs didn't get the autonomy they needed to develop the models they needed to develop," he says.

He can easily reconcile that with his top-down approach. "I'm about centralized and aggressive intervention, but I support diversity in management models and decentralization for local decision making."

As CEO, Vallas was tough on the private managers. He fired one company, Chancellor Beacon, barely a year into their contract. He borrowed what he liked; he instituted a version of Edison's monthly computerized Benchmark testing program for the entire system, and gave some district schools equivalent extra dollars per pupil to see what they could do with more resources. He seemed to prefer charters, recruiting nationally successful models like KIPP, and urging some locally grown ones to open new schools.

Studies of the effects of private management have produced inconsistent conclusions. One report by RAND and Research for Action, a local group, said the privately managed schools did no better than others and weren't worth the extra investment. But a Harvard study, by *Education Next* editor Paul Peterson and Matthew Chingos, showed that the public schools managed by for-profit companies were more successful at raising student performance than either the district-run schools or those operated by nonprofit organizations.

"The positive," Vallas says, "is that they took the worst schools and they made gains comparable to the district as a whole. If you want to be negative, you can say we invested more money in them, but the schools didn't perform better than the district schools. The bottom line is, I think the EMOs proved to be a good whipping boy...the rest of the school district benefited from a substantial amount of additional money the EMOs brought in."

"I had some schools in Philly, more than half the kids were not being raised by their biological parent." ***In New Orleans***, he says, "***the hurricane intensified the trauma***, and I have to make adjustments for that."

The Next Challenge

For certain, Vallas saw poverty before arriving in New Orleans. "I had some schools in Philly, more than half the kids were not being raised by their biological parent." In New Orleans, he says, "the hurricane intensified the trauma, and I have to make adjustments for that." He recites his litany of remedies: the longer school day and year, a managed, standardized instructional program, and so forth, but he also adds "more counselors, mentors, more school-based behavioral health services, obviously you have to bring more resources to the schools to provide for the needs of the children."

Vallas now sits in a tiny, unadorned office in the Recovery School District headquarters. It is a former warehouse painted yellow, brick-red, and green and flanked by an abandoned commercial site and a new post office, across a potholed street from several boarded-up houses that form the landscape of what is now New Orleans. The single metal door that people enter to register their children is pockmarked with rust. There are no nameplates on the office doors, just Scotch-taped paper announcing the room number. Staffers bring lunch, because there is no place within walking distance to buy food.

From here, Vallas directs 39 schools with 14,000 students and supervises another 26 charter schools. (The Orleans Parish School Board is in control of 7 schools plus 12 charters, some of which operate under the Algiers Charter Schools Association.) He is again in the middle of a devastated city, trying to mesh his litany of top-down remedies with private management and charters.

He hardly ever sits still. On this day, he has taken a pill to calm him for an airplane trip that he ultimately decides not to take, and at 6'5" seems confined by the room. In the Crescent City, he lives with his oldest son, Paulie, who has just graduated from high school, in a spare apartment not far from the Convention Center; his wife Sharon and three other sons are back in Chicago.

Working 12- to 16-hour days, and demanding the same of his staff, he caroms from his office to schools to working lunches to meetings to evening events. The warren of narrow, barren hallways and small rooms is constantly in motion. In one room, Gwen Morris and another Philadelphia recruit, Nilsa Gonzales, are crunching the numbers to get an afterschool program going. In another, Deputy Superintendent Kyle Wedberg, who also worked in Philadelphia, is trying to figure out how to handle the delicate problem of cutting teachers, many of whom worked in New Orleans before the hurricane but have failed to meet certification requirements. People run from one office to the next, phones to ears and papers in hand. In addition to whatever they are doing, they must be poised at a moment's notice to respond to Vallas's latest command. The sense of urgency is palpable.

On an October Tuesday, shortly before he must submit a spending plan to BESE, Vallas presides over a staff meeting. Most everyone else is bent over a BlackBerry, notebook, or laptop, taking notes on what Vallas wants. He sits at the head of the table with one foot on his chair, knee drawn to his chin. From this posture, he barks orders.

"Get Dell on the phone and set up training dates for teachers to use the new EPIC computers the district has been promised. Hold any payment until they're set."

He switches gears. "I'm trying to get the state to understand that we can't open ten new charter schools in a year. We're almost at the saturation point." Then, "We need space for preschool kids with disabilities."

"Obviously you have to bring more resources to the schools to provide for the needs of the children," Vallas says.

Next, he's on to alternative schools. "Give me Abraxas," he says, referring to a company hired in Philadelphia to deal with elementary-age offenders. "We have kids under indictment for murder who are in elementary school. That's a concern here."

He exhorts everyone to be on the hunt for sources of funds. "You know what I want, as we manage this, we all have to be budget directors in our own right."

As he talks about all his programs, he gets more urgent. He points out that between 50 and 60 percent of the students have failed LEAP, Louisiana's state test. "Kids are giving up, they don't think they can pass the LEAP exam. God, only 38 percent graduate…they're leaping off a cliff. If you think I'm off the reservation here, let me know."

On the way back from a working lunch, Vallas spies a young boy sitting in the back of a police cruiser in front of a school. Like a shot, he's out of the car and into the school, commandeering the principal's office, finding out that the boy hit a teacher, telling her that she'll soon get a "climate manager" to help deal with the traumatized families of children like this. He gets out his cell phone and orders Eddie Compass to get to the school, pronto.

Compass, the former New Orleans police chief, soon materializes at Vallas's side. Later, Compass explains how he had a low-pressure, high-paying consulting job when Vallas changed his life in a ten-minute hallway conversation. "He's probably the most incredible man I ever met,"Compass remarks. "He said, 'We need people who will make a difference.' If he as an outsider is doing this, how can people who live in the city not help him?"

That evening, Vallas attends a house party hosted by Edison Schools, which has been hired by the Broadmoor Improvement Association to operate a charter school in the neighborhood. He mutters as he goes in that he would like to see more charters; a few weeks later, he will announce that he wants to give all principals more autonomy next year.

At the party, Vallas is treated like a rock star. "He's bringing us world-class experience and knowledge," said Phyllis Landrieu, president of the New Orleans Parish School Board. "He's been at the top of the world in education, and he knows how to show us the way."

Cheryllyn Branche is principal of the Banneker Elementary School and one of the few veteran New Orleans educators welcomed back into the system. Like other New Orleans natives, Branche lost her home to Hurricane Katrina. Though she likes Vallas and is attracted to his energy and commitment, she questions whether he is thinking through his policies and initiatives. For instance, does after-school make sense in a district where there are hardly any neighborhood schools, many parents don't have cars, and public transportation is spotty?

"Resources are being pushed to the school level. That's something that never happened before," she said. But she worries whether the specific programs these dollars are funding are the right kinds of initiatives. "The EPIC computers, technology, how much difference will they make if the teachers don't know how to use them?"

In New Orleans, she adds, "Paul Vallas faces challenges I'm sure he's never had."

When Vallas unveiled his two-year spending plan in late October 2007, it included laptops for every high school student, interactive "whiteboards" for every classroom from grades 4 through 12, an extended day, class size no larger than 20 in elementary school and 25 in high school, and special programs for academically lagging 8th graders. BESE members—his bosses—were concerned how he could pull this off with the available dollars. Vallas allayed their fears, but by December the RSD was facing a cash crunch brought on partly by spending on his initiatives and partly by school construction costs not immediately reimbursed by FEMA. With benchmark tests showing that 80 percent of students were reading below grade level, he declined to save money by laying off teachers, preferring to rely on his seasoned financial team to balance the books while retaining crucial educational services.

"We opted," he told the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, "to put children ahead of cash flow."

Dale Mezzacappa covered education for the Philadelphia Inquirer *between 1986 and 2006 and is now a freelance writer.*

Going for the Gold

Secrets of successful schools

Public school leaders throughout the United States are approaching consensus about what it takes to educate all students well: more class time, smaller schools, a college preparatory curriculum, instructional coaching for teachers, and utilization of data to understand student needs. Yet results on the ground vary dramatically and remain, in large part, disappointing. Despite similar student demographics and budget constraints, a few schools report great results year after year, while many struggle. Why is it that some schools can sustain high graduation and college acceptance rates, while others, with the same basic design, have 50 percent dropout rates?

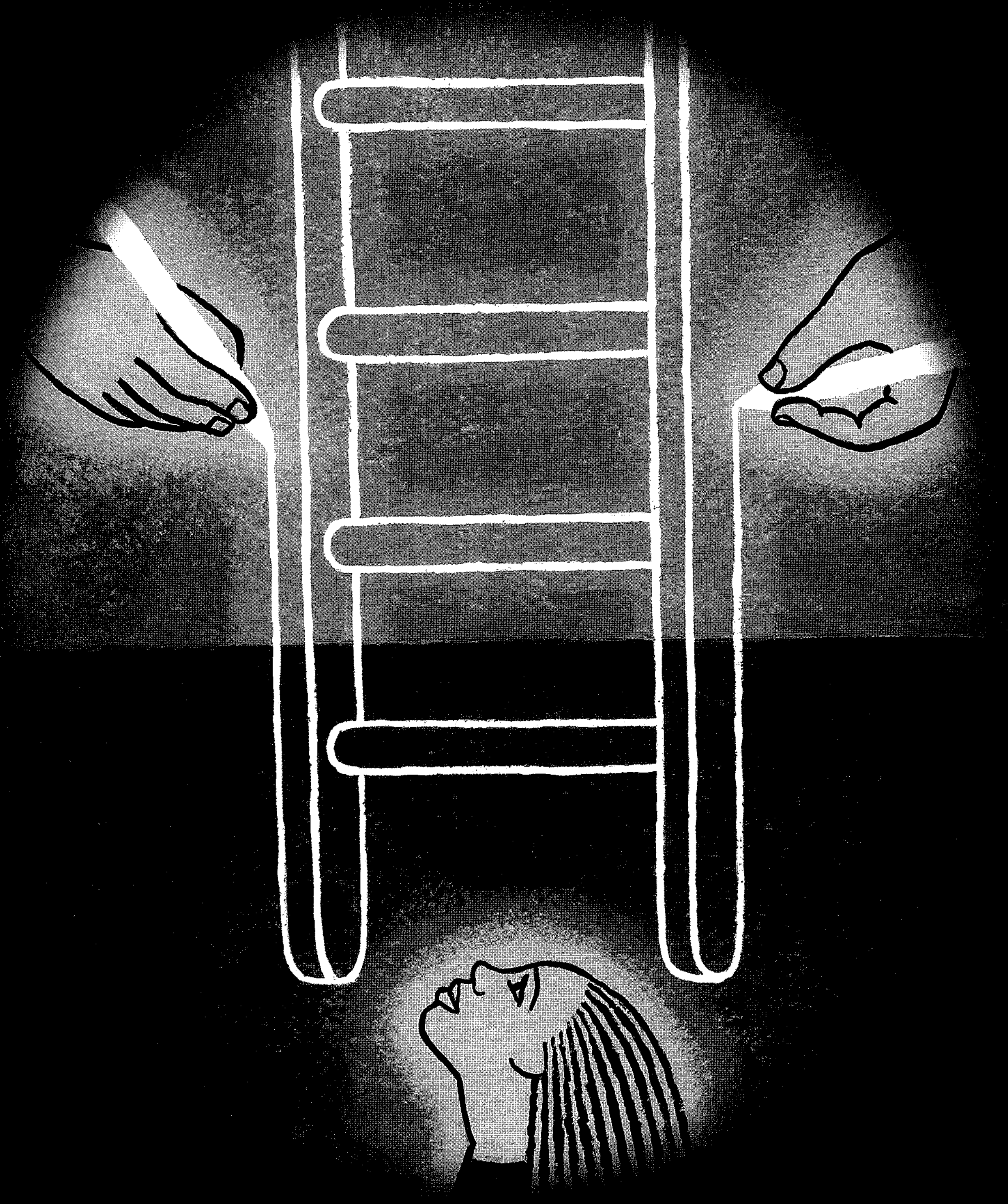
The Bridgespan Group is a nonprofit organization that works with other nonprofits and foundations on issues of strategy, philanthropy, and leadership. In our work with public school educators seeking to close the achievement gap for disadvantaged students, we have confronted this question often and have come to believe that the critical difference between schools that excel and schools that do not is the quality of execution. Leaders must be willing to make choices about what matters most and then "sweat the details" in aligning resources and effort behind those choices.

When a school is able to execute a good design successfully, everyone—leaders, teachers, administrators—agrees about what drives student achievement. Equally important, they do not allow their priorities to be sidetracked in the face of day-to-day pressures and pulls from other directions.

This article highlights the experiences of three education nonprofits with which Bridgespan has engaged: YES Prep Public Schools, KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), and Envision Schools. All three have school designs that incorporate the widely-agreed-upon elements mentioned above, and all three have achieved sustained results (YES Prep and KIPP for over a decade) on the dimension that

BY BARRY NEWSTEAD, AMY SAXTON, and SUSAN J. COLBY

ILLUSTRATION / JAMES STEINBERG



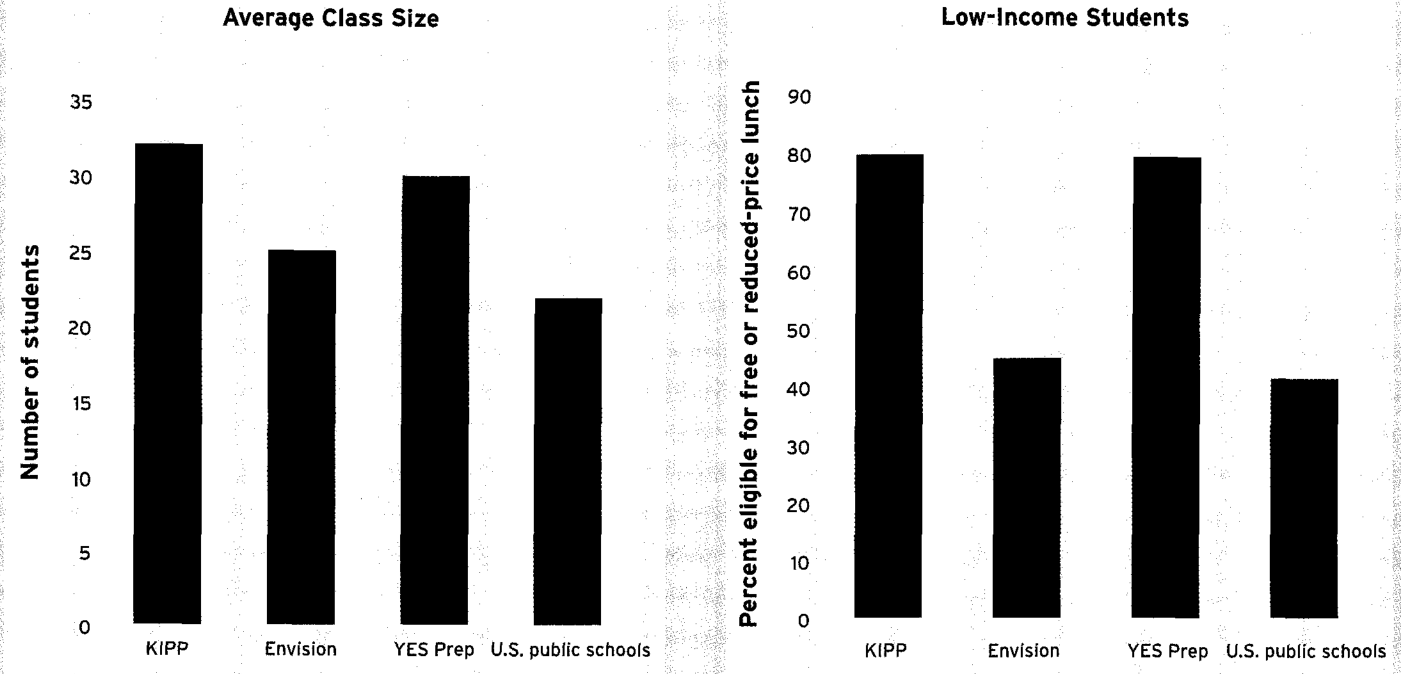
matters most: their students' performance. In addition, they have successfully replicated these results in multiple schools.

Design Is Necessary, but Insufficient

It clearly matters that YES Prep, KIPP, and Envision schools are well designed, but many other districts and schools are also making good design choices. To achieve sustained success, commitment to the design needs to be followed up with consistent resource allocation decisions and well-crafted systems and processes that support the design intent. Leadership time spent "on task" is also an important factor. Too often, school leaders get bogged down by disciplinary, administrative, operational, and/or political issues and don't have time to dedicate to the most important part of their school: what goes on in the classrooms. We have surveyed school leaders in a number of client organizations. At less successful schools, leaders spend less than one-quarter of their time on student learning, teacher professional development, and school culture. Leaders at more effective schools dedicate more than half of the day to these high-value activities.

Different by Design (Figure 1)

YES Prep, KIPP, and Envision Schools achieve strong results with higher proportions of low-income and minority students a whole.



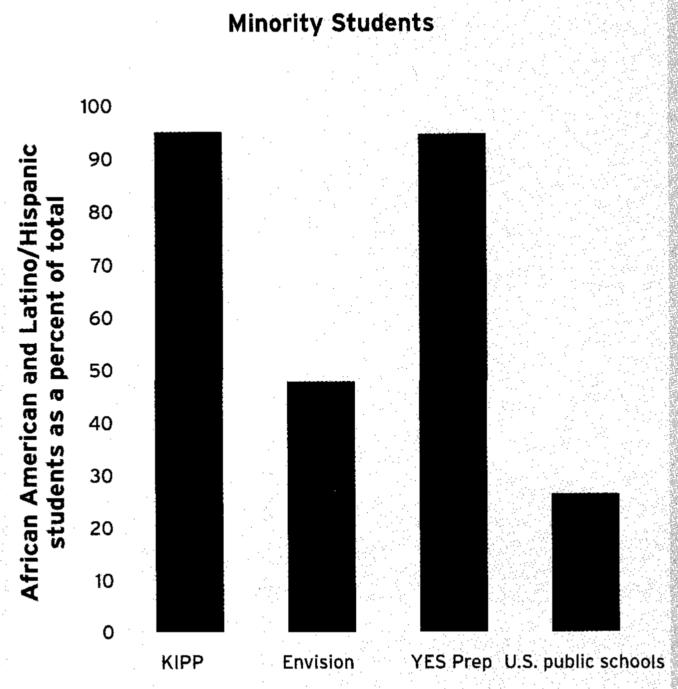
NOTE: U.S. public school class-size averages and figures on eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch are from the 2003-04 school year; figures on U.S. public school minority composition are from 2005. Envision data are for 2007-08, except for class size (2006-07). KIPP data are for 2006-07. YES Prep data are for 2004-05.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education; KIPP; Envision Schools; Bridgespan Group

Achieving that level of focus and the momentum that accompanies it is difficult, even when a school is new and has been created with a particular educational approach. When a school leader is attempting to turn around a poorly performing school, the task becomes even harder, although perhaps more critical. In poorly performing schools, there are usually more challenges to contend with, such as demoralized staff (which often leads to high turnover), increasing pressures from district staff to meet adequate yearly progress targets on standardized tests, and physical environments that are poorly maintained and often unsafe. It can be enormously challenging to create a sense of urgency for change; identify a vision that a team can align behind; and ensure that school staff, students, parents, and key partners are ready, willing, and able to do the painful work of changing expectations and behavior.

In this larger context, the issues faced by the leaders at KIPP, YES Prep, and Envision, all three of them charter organizations, may differ on some dimensions from those of their peers in district schools (see Figure 1). The potential for distraction, however, is equally great. Our case studies illustrate what it looks like to establish and maintain a focus on what matters most in practice at these three organizations. These schools are succeeding in creating a culture in which student learning is central and the immediate (or comfortable) does not trump the important. Their strategies for executing their school designs are instructive for all public school leaders.

and larger average class sizes than the U.S. public schools as



YES Prep Public Schools

YES Prep was conceived in 1995 by a group of teachers, parents, and community leaders as a program within an existing school. In 1998, under the leadership of teacher Chris Barbic, they opened their first school. Today, YES Prep is an open-enrollment public school organization that serves 2,100 predominantly low-income (80 percent) and minority (95 percent Latino or African-American) middle- and high-school students at five schools in Houston, Texas. Most students enter YES Prep schools one or more grade levels behind in math and English.

Over its history, the organization has achieved remarkable outcomes: 100 percent of YES Prep graduates have been accepted to four-year colleges, and YES Prep schools consistently rank among the best on the Texas state standardized tests. In 2006, and again in 2007, YES Prep ranked among the "Top 100 High Schools in America" in *Newsweek* magazine.

YES Prep schools are rooted in the belief that what matters most to the success of students in high school, college, and beyond is the quality of their interactions with teachers. So for YES Prep, the priority is recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers who are committed to doing "whatever it takes" (the YES Prep motto) to prepare students to graduate from a four-year college.

"When we started with the first school, we had 17 teachers," Chief Academic Officer Jennifer Pagani reflected during a recent interview. "Those teachers were incredibly, intensely dedicated to their craft—really thoughtful and spirited practitioners. And looking back at that first year, it seemed to us that it was all about the teaching. It was about how the teachers interacted with the students, and it was about the standards that the teachers set for students to meet. We got results, so we figured that's what we needed to focus on."

As they thought about building on their experience, however, she and Barbic also realized that it would be a challenge to sustain their success, let alone replicate it. The trick would be to find (and keep) the large number of mission-aligned educators who would make the commitment to YES Prep. "We realized that in order to preserve the intensity of instruction that we had in the school, we needed to figure out teacher development and retention," says Pagani.

They also felt strongly that leaders of YES Prep schools would have to be great teachers, groomed from within the organization.

Sweating the Details

To that end, Barbic and Pagani began to invest time and resources on recruiting and developing teachers. The approach, which is constantly being honed, begins with rigorous, and increasingly scientific, selection and includes extensive ongoing support and training once they hire a teacher.

"We used to hire people who looked great on paper and were passionate," Pagani explains, "but there was still more attrition than we wanted to see, and inconsistent results. So we worked with a psychologist to develop a personality profile of an ideal YES Prep teacher. We did this looking at our most successful teachers based on the results they got with their students. We also looked at subjective inputs, including how they interacted with students. And we came up with the seven personality traits that really define a YES Prep teacher [see table, page 42]. If you're not hitting five of the seven, you're not right for this program."

Candidates also teach during the recruiting process. "We ask them to do a lesson plan. And then they teach in front of our students. We get to see what things they prioritize, and the kind of rapport they develop with students. And it gives us a sense of what they value as teachers."

Professional development for YES Prep teachers begins before they ever enter the classroom, and once started, it never really stops. At its core is a strong teacher-coaching staff, which represents a major investment of time and money. Each YES Prep school has two dedicated coaches on staff who support about 10 teachers each. And as with teacher recruiting, YES Prep is constantly refining its approach to coaching. Early on, coaches met on a regular schedule with all of the teachers they were supporting. But as time passed, Pagani and Barbic recognized that new teachers in particular needed an even higher level of hands-on support. "We've started trying some alternative scheduling," Pagani explains, "so that our coaches go to work with a single teacher for three or four days straight, modeling lessons, watching lessons, providing immediate feedback, helping with lesson planning, and then coming in the next day as well."

In addition, YES Prep has been creating a teacher handbook that is a living document constantly under revision. YES Prep teachers have created evaluation rubrics that provide them, and observers, with a pragmatic guide for what YES Prep teaching should look like in the classroom.

Seven Key Traits of an Ideal YES Prep Teacher

- Quick rebound time
- High energy mode
- Eagerness to take charge
- Willingness to deal with conflict head-on
- Outspoken
- Perfectionist
- Driven

YES Prep aligns people, resources, and time around developing great teachers. School directors play a vital role in this effort. Directors are all former YES teachers, and they are groomed as classroom leaders and school culture builders. Once in the role, school directors continue to teach to stay connected to the classroom; they also set priorities so that they can spend the majority of their day observing classrooms and coaching teachers. From the beginning, Barbic created systems that would enable school leaders to focus on student learning and teacher development. For example, the disciplinary system distributes day-to-day enforcement responsibilities across the staff and, in some cases, among the students themselves. This arrangement enables school leaders to focus on what matters most.

YES Prep leaders have made difficult choices to maintain their priority focus on teachers. They increased total school enrollment and average class sizes in order to fit additional instructional resources into the budget. They also cut costs in their extracurricular programs and sought ways to keep facilities, transportation, and other non-classroom costs from dominating the budget.

"Not to say that you can't get results any other way, but for us, it started out being about excellent teaching—and spending a lot of time on the development of materials for teaching, and on the art of teaching," Pagani explains. "That's what we did, and it worked, so that's what we're going to stick with."

KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program)

Teach For America alums Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin created the Knowledge Is Power Program in 1994 with the goal of improving academic outcomes for underserved students. But they based KIPP on the idea that the key to creating and sustaining a successful school is leadership. As Feinberg puts it, "Instructional strategy, funding, and curriculum are important concerns, but they don't make or break a school. The leader does."

Armed with this shared belief and the confidence that they could lead, Feinberg and Levin launched KIPP as a 5th-grade public school program in inner-city Houston, Texas. Then in 1995, Feinberg remained in Houston and Levin returned home to New York City to establish KIPP in the South Bronx. "We were in horrible buildings; we didn't have any money; we weren't using the same curriculum," Feinberg recalls. "But those things really weren't essentials." What was essential was Feinberg's and Levin's ability to motivate teachers and influence what went on in the classrooms, from determining curriculum to selecting and managing teachers.

By 1999, the schools were performing at the top of their districts. That same year, the CBS News television show *60 Minutes* featured KIPP, which drew the attention of Doris and Donald Fisher, founders of Gap, Inc. The Fishers invested $15 million to form the KIPP Foundation, with a goal of replicating KIPP schools nationwide for the country's neediest children. The KIPP Foundation focuses its efforts on recruiting, training, and supporting outstanding teachers to become school leaders and on opening new, locally run KIPP schools in high-need communities.

The KIPP Foundation provided a platform for Feinberg and Levin to test their approach on a larger scale. To do so, they had to articulate the KIPP design more fully. The first two schools each had their individual styles and strengths. How could that translate into a replicable formula?

In tackling this task, Feinberg says, they "backed into" the five essential tenets of the KIPP model: High Expectations (for academic achievement and conduct); Choice and Commitment (KIPP students, parents, and teachers all sign a learning pledge, promising to devote the time and effort needed to succeed); More Time (extended school day, week, and year); Power to Lead (school leaders have significant autonomy, including control over their budget, personnel, and culture); and Focus on Results (scores on standardized tests and other objective measures are coupled with a focus on character development).

Articulating these five tenets was a significant step toward formalizing the KIPP model. But what mattered most was, and is, putting a strong leader in each school. As Feinberg puts it, "If we truly do a great job of recruiting and selecting a leader for a school, then technically we're done. The school will be successful. Any training or help we can give would be nice, but it's not necessary. The leader is going to find a way to do it."

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Sweating the Details

To ensure that the right school leaders are selected and that those leaders have every opportunity to hone their skills before taking on a school, the KIPP Foundation has invested heavily in leader recruiting and training. The KIPP School Leadership Program is a yearlong effort that includes a four-week intensive training session (originally offered through UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business and now located at the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute), residencies at other KIPP schools, and support from experienced KIPP staff. The program attracts applicants from organizations across the country. KIPP chooses its school leaders from among the graduates, evaluating candidates on 11 competencies that include critical thinking, communication skills, key personal attributes, and prior experience with disadvantaged students.

The KIPP Foundation helps each new school leader and location secure facilities and a charter, and build a strong board. Once a school opens, the foundation provides professional development opportunities to the growing network of KIPP teachers, school leaders, and support staff through content retreats and the weeklong KIPP School Summit. But decisionmaking, including curriculum, faculty selection, budgeting, and all other local-level details, is left to the school leader and the local board of directors.

KIPP has grown substantially since receiving the initial KIPP Foundation grant. As of this writing, there are 57 KIPP schools (including elementary, middle, and high schools) in 17 states and Washington, D.C., serving more than 14,000 students. Almost all are public charter schools. Students who entered KIPP schools in 2005 achieved the largest academic gains made in the 10 years since KIPP began.

In 2006, Richard Barth became CEO of the KIPP Foundation. Under his leadership, the foundation has begun to cluster KIPP schools in certain areas. These clusters each have a superintendent who works with school leaders and the KIPP Foundation. According to Barth, "The benefits of growth through localized scale are compelling. Not only are local superintendents of KIPP schools better positioned than our national staff to identify and groom local talent and ensure long-term sustainability; the pooling and sharing of support services allows the energy and time of our school leaders to remain focused on the highest-value activities: working with faculty, students, and families." This is in stark contrast to many districts, where principals are overburdened with administrative activities.

Outside of the school inspection process that the KIPP Foundation conducts, the schools are accountable for their own results and school culture. "If they want to have someone heading up instructional leadership, that's their prerogative," Feinberg says. "It's like being a head football coach. If their specialty is defense, they might not need a defensive coordinator. A great leader knows where his or her strengths are and where the holes are....I don't think there's 'one way' to do it. It's up to them. We look at the test scores at the end of the year."

Envision Schools

In the late 1990s, Bob Lenz was teaching at the Sir Francis Drake High School in San Anselmo, California, working on new approaches to educating students. "We had been experimenting with breaking up the school into learning communities, we called them 'academies,' and we were doing a lot of project-based, interdisciplinary learning," Lenz explains. The idea was that the material the students were learning in one class—science, say—could be integrated with the work they were doing in other classes.

The approach was successful; in 1999, Drake was named a New American High School and featured in *U.S. News & World Report*. The problem, Lenz says, was that he "kept hearing how project-based learning was nice for wealthy, suburban kids, but, 'kids in urban settings aren't going to be able to do this kind of work.'"

Project-based, interdisciplinary learning requires teaching teams to integrate a theme or project into rigorous lesson plans from a variety of disciplines, and to coordinate delivery among teachers and across classrooms so that projects progress apace and students meet curriculum goals. This approach presents numerous day-to-day challenges and demands aligned systems for instructional leadership and coaching. "I saw places where this work was being done," Lenz says, "and it wasn't sustainable because the systems pushed against it."

Determined to create a system in which his innovative instructional approach would work for disadvantaged children, Lenz co-founded Envision Schools with Daniel McLaughlin in 2001. As of this writing, Envision operates four San Francisco Bay Area high schools that serve predominantly first-generation college-bound and low-income students. The young organization has already achieved notable success: in 2005 its first campus, Marin School of Arts and Technology (MSAT), was the highest-performing school in its district on California's academic performance index (API). That same year, Envision's second campus, City Arts & Tech High School (CAT), had the highest API gain in the San Francisco Unified School District, and it was rated as one of 12 exemplary schools in the nation by the U.S. Department of Education. In the 2006–7 school year, MSAT, CAT, and Envision's third campus, Metropolitan Arts & Tech High School (Metro), outperformed the state average on the percentage of 10th-grade students passing the California High School Exit Exam.

Not surprisingly, what matters most at Envision—the focal point of execution—is its instructional system, which requires a team of teachers, facilitative leadership, high-quality analytical tools, and expert support. "We use a triangle to describe what we have," says Lenz (see Figure 2). The first point of the triangle is ensuring that students master the content. The second is having them be able to demonstrate their knowledge, in the form of a project, such as a short documentary—something that requires presentation. For example, a student might do research on an environmental issue in a science class, create a public service announcement about the issue in a digital media class, and write a persuasive paper about it in English language arts. The third point of the triangle is building in a way to chart students' progress over time and having them reflect on what they have learned and how. The idea is to create a tangible context for everything a student learns, so that it has meaning and resonates over time.

> "We knew that we had to have a CEO, but we didn't want the educational model to become subservient to the organization's operations, so we chose the education officer title for balance."

Sweating the Details

In aligning resources and people to achieve results for students, Envision's leaders started with their own positions. The organization's executive leadership is a partnership of two CEOs—the chief executive officer (McLaughlin) and the chief education officer (CEdO, Lenz).

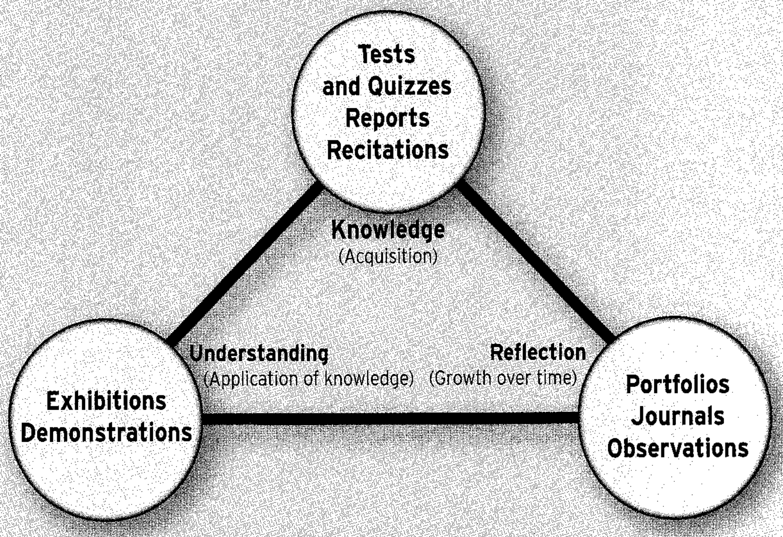
"We designed the instructional model first, and then started thinking about how we would create a business model to support it," Lenz explains. "We knew that we had to have a CEO, but we didn't want the educational model to become subservient to the organization's operations, so we chose the education officer title for balance. It creates a healthy tension, and as we've brought in people on one side, we bring someone in on the other side to maintain the balance."

Envision invested up front in a dedicated team to deploy and refine its model. This investment meant that schools would need to be situated in lower-cost locations and that ancillary afterschool programs would need to be kept to a minimum. Further, Envision made the decision not to provide transportation and food services.

Lenz and Director of Instruction Jeannette LaFors spend much of their time working with schools: meeting weekly with school principals and teachers at their campuses, analyzing and reflecting on results, building out Envision's professional development programs, and working with teachers to create tools that can support projects. "Our expectation is that teachers jointly will be designing projects that make them interdependent," says LaFors, whose core responsibility is facilitating teacher teams. "That's very different than in traditional schools, where teachers often work in silos, responsible solely for their own areas."

Envision Instructional System (Figure 2)

The Triangle: Master Content, Demonstrate Knowledge, Chart Progress



SOURCE: Envision Schools

Lenz, LeFors, and the teaching teams at each school spend time every week reviewing student results and sharing classroom observations to reflect on and enhance their practice. This time is built into the school schedule, and the associated financial cost of having the full teaching team together is prioritized in the budget.

One of the most visible signs of Envision's commitment to sweating the details of its instructional system is student "exhibitions." "They speak to the collective responsibility the teachers have for the students," Lenz explains. "Students will tell you about how rigorous and rewarding exhibitions are. Teachers will tell you the same thing."

As Envision has matured as an organization, its leaders have had to address the realities on the ground to maintain their focus on what matters most. When the organization was still in its early stages, for example, they realized principals were spending a significant amount of time on facilities procurement and maintenance and very little time in classrooms. So this year Envision took the job off of the school leaders' plate by adding a facilities manager centrally and, as of this writing, is looking at adding an operations manager at each school. At the same time, Envision reset expectations for instructional leadership among principals supported by new professional development and tools developed by the instructional leadership team.

What Works

YES Prep, KIPP, and Envision illustrate the central thesis that quality execution—deciding what matters most and sweating the details—underlies strong results for students. Their school designs incorporate many of the same elements that other educators and policymakers are now embracing. The "innovation" at YES Prep, KIPP, and Envision—the differentiator that sets them apart—is the effort expended on the day-to-day leadership and management challenges.

All three align money, people, and leadership time to their most important activities. All three are building systems that translate general concepts into specific, repeatable actions that ensure quality execution throughout the organization. Finally, they move quickly to make changes when things aren't working as planned.

As we consider the national challenge of providing a quality education to all children, whatever their starting point, we need to address not only matters of educational structure and policy, but also—and critically—the on-the-ground execution required to improve teaching and learning every day, in tens of thousands of classrooms. To obtain the best possible results for students, school leaders must have the mandate, the support, and the discipline to maintain a relentless focus on what matters most.

Barry Newstead and Susan Colby are partners at The Bridgespan Group, where Amy Saxton is case team leader.

Voting Down

lessons

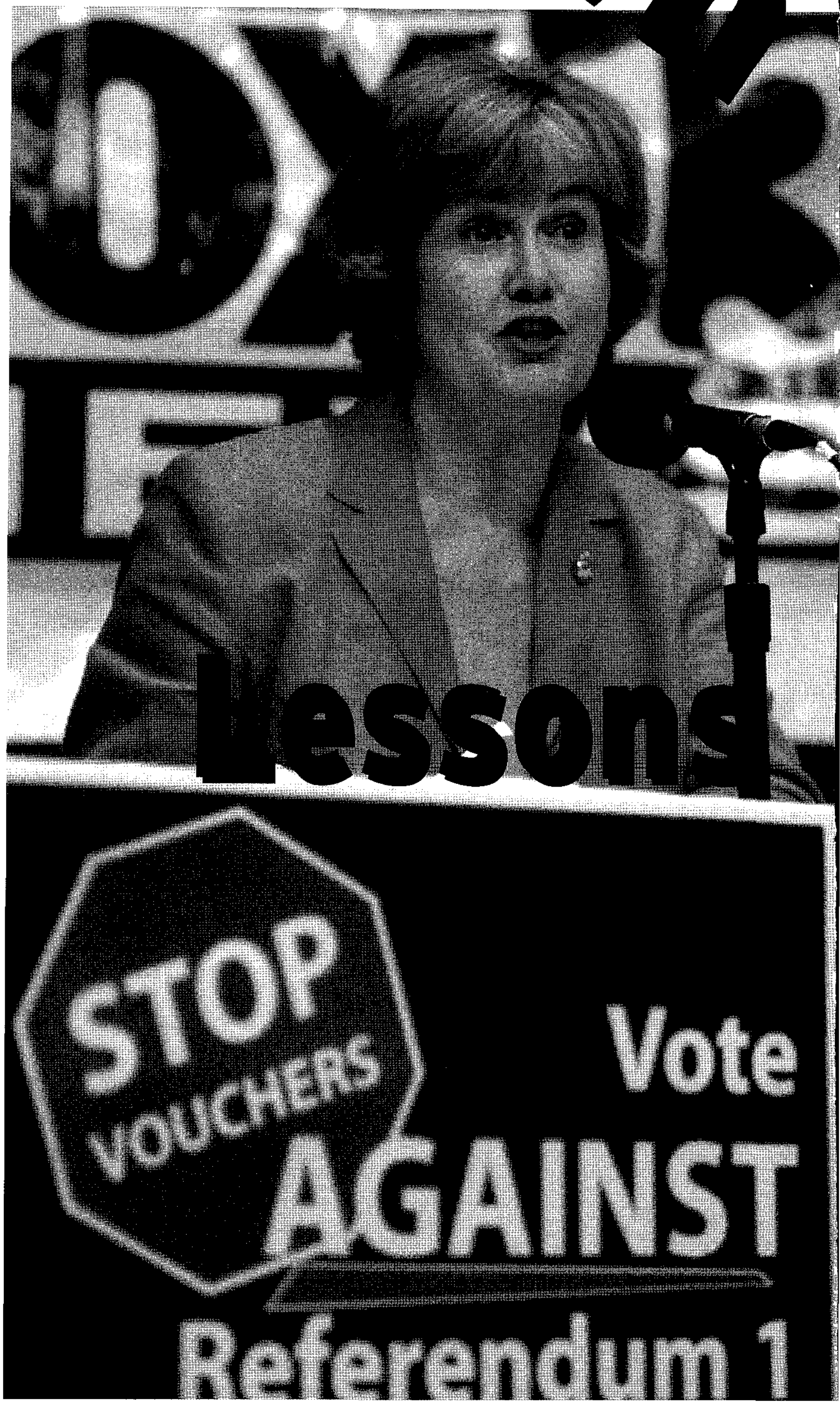
BY CLINT BOLICK

In 1999 the Ohio Supreme Court found the Cleveland school voucher program to be constitutional, thereby allowing the three-year-old initiative to continue. Shortly thereafter, the anti-voucher coalition filed suit in federal court, asking for a preliminary injunction that would end the program until the court could decide the case. Despite the disruption such an injunction would cause, Judge Solomon Oliver proved remarkably cooperative, enjoining the program on the eve of the fourth year of its operation: four thousand students from low-income families would have to give up the voucher assistance that had allowed them to attend private (mainly religious) schools until it could be determined whether the program violated the "establishment of religion" clause of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment.

Teachers unions and other members of the anti-voucher coalition were elated. For the first time, an ongoing school voucher program had been halted.

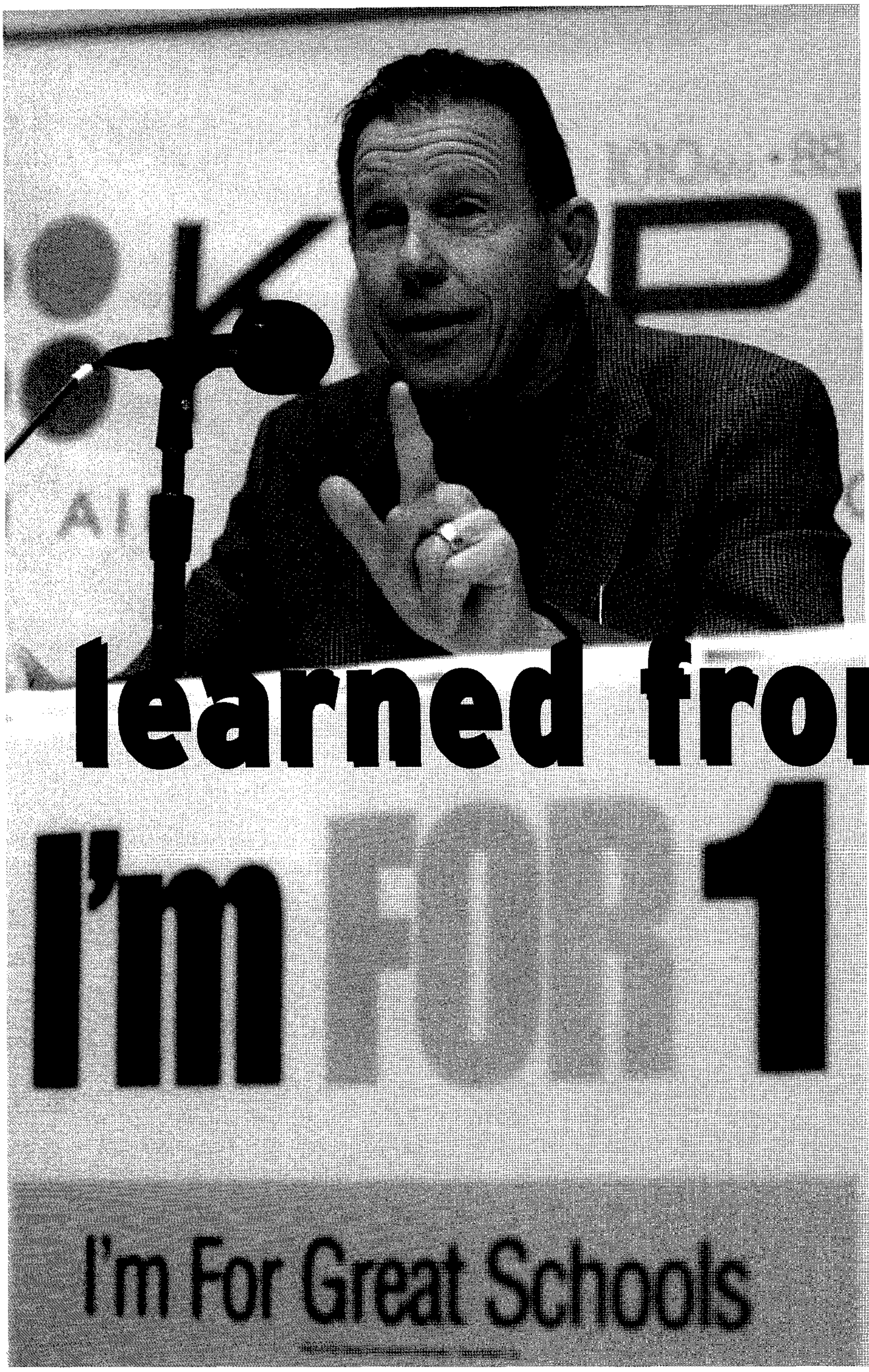
But the judge's decision provoked a powerful backlash. Newspaper editorials condemned it; one cartoon depicted a school bus running down black children, with a crazed Judge Oliver at the wheel. The Bradley Foundation, John Walton, Ted Forstmann, and others pledged millions of dollars to keep the kids in school. Realizing he had reached too far, Judge Oliver reversed part of his ruling, and the U.S. Supreme Court dissolved the remainder of the injunction. Even though an appeals court later affirmed the judge's subsequent ruling on the substance, that decision was itself overturned in 2002 by the Supreme Court in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, which found no violation of the "establishment clause" as long as students had a choice of school, religious or secular.

The anti-voucher lobby learned a valuable lesson: fighting school choice in the abstract is fine, but forcing disadvantaged kids out of good schools is risky business.



Vouchers

learned from Utah



PHOTOS / AP IMAGES

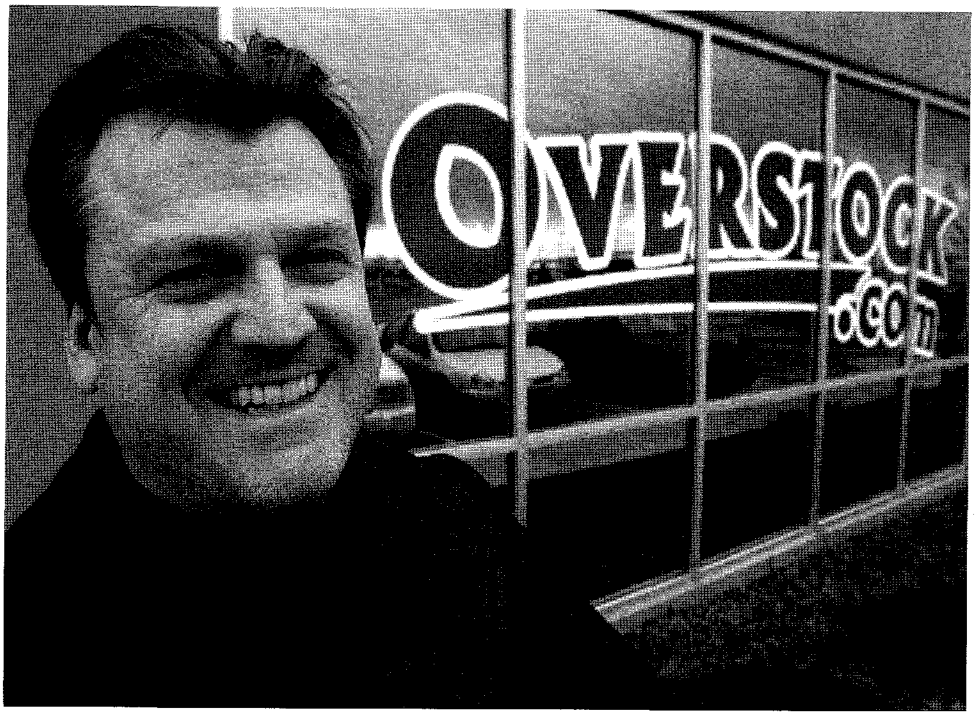
Five years later, the tables turned. School choice activists, myself included, celebrated the passage of the nation's first universal voucher program in Utah. But it turned out, just as it had for the unions in Cleveland, that we had badly overplayed our hand. Making use of a little-known provision in the Utah constitution, voucher opponents put the new law up for a referendum, where voters killed the voucher program by a large margin.

The teachers unions and their public-school allies schooled us. Now our future prospects depend on how much we learned in the process.

Vouchers in Utah

Since the landmark *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* ruling, the school choice movement's progress in enacting vouchers and tax-credit legislation has been steady but slow. Voucher and tax credit programs have been enacted by the District of Columbia, Florida, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and elsewhere, but such gains have been offset by disappointing setbacks in states such as Texas, South Carolina, and Missouri, despite energetic pro-choice campaigns in these states. Even worse, courts in Colorado and Florida struck down voucher programs that had survived the legislative gauntlet. While each year since 2002 has witnessed new programs and a net increase in children enrolled in them, only around 100,000 students in the United States today are enrolled in publicly funded voucher or tax-credit programs.

So when a universal voucher program was proposed for Utah, the school choice



In 2000, Parents for Choice in Education, given financial backing by Patrick Byrne, CEO of Overstock.com, took the lead in promoting vouchers for disadvantaged youngsters.

movement jumped at the opportunity, even though it arose in perhaps the most unlikely of places. Utah's public schools compare well nationally, with students scoring higher than the U.S. average in every subject and at every grade level. The state has relatively small urban, minority, and low-income populations, the key constituencies for school choice. Utah's population is only 17 percent nonwhite, compared with 26.1 percent nationally; only 33 percent of its students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch compared with 42 percent nationally. The state's large Mormon population generally eschews private alternatives in favor of public schools.

Though Utah's public-school system outperforms those in most states, it is not without its weaknesses. Problems are especially pronounced among Hispanics, who account for 12 percent of the state's population but a much larger share of dropouts. While most Utahns give high grades to public schools, half of Utah's Hispanics rank their public schools fair or poor.

In 2000, Parents for Choice in Education (PCE), a pro-voucher advocacy group, spearheaded by businessman Doug Holmes and given handsome financial backing by the founder and CEO of Overstock.com, Patrick Byrne, took the lead. Like groups then emerging in other states, PCE promoted vouchers for disadvantaged youngsters, even though its long-term objective was to provide choice for all families in Utah.

PCE was encouraged in its efforts by a variety of groups, foundations, and philanthropists from across the country. The Alliance for School Choice, a group financed by wealthy philanthropists, provided funding for lobbying and educational efforts in states, like Utah, that seemed ready to consider voucher or tax-credit legislation. The late Milton Friedman and his wife, Rose, economists whose advocacy of school vouchers began as early as 1955, had poured much of their personal fortune into a foundation bearing their name and solely devoted to turning their voucher theory into legislated reality. Meanwhile, Dick and Betsy DeVos (Dick, son of Amway cofounder Rich DeVos, is the former president of Amway's parent company and was a 2006 Michigan gubernatorial candidate; Betsy is former chairperson of the Michigan Republican Party) established All Children Matter, a group that sought to elect state and local officials committed to choice. All three groups viewed Utah's prospects favorably and supported PCE's local efforts.

PCE focused its attention primarily on legislative and electoral politics. The organization's first foray was a tiny special-needs voucher program called the Carson Smith bill, which was passed by the Utah legislature but vetoed by Republican governor Olene Walker. PCE and its allies helped thwart Walker's subsequent election bid, and she was replaced in 2004 by a pro-voucher Republican, Jon Huntsman Jr.

While in March 2005 Huntsman reversed the Walker veto by signing into law the Carson Smith bill providing vouchers for students with special needs, the legislature fell just short of assembling the coalition necessary to enact a broader voucher bill. Again the Utah and national forces went to work, and in 2006 Utah was one of only two states to elect state legislatures that were more Republican than before. (The other, Georgia, passed its first school-voucher program, for children with disabilities, the following year.)

Led by PCE, the voucher coalition developed an innovative legislative vehicle. Bridging the gap between advocates of universal vouchers (favored by the Friedman Foundation) and means-tested vouchers (preferred by the Alliance for School Choice), the bill made vouchers available to all, but staggered the amounts by family income, with awards ranging from a minimum of $500 to $3,000 for the lowest-income children. Moreover, the bill provided that public schools would keep for a period of five years the difference between the voucher amount and ordinary per-pupil funding.

Hamstrung by a paycheck protection law that forbids the involuntary use of union dues for political purposes, the Utah teachers union proved no match for the school choice team in either the electoral or legislative arenas, and the bill was enacted and signed into law. But the union did not give up. Expected to file a legal challenge, for which the program's backers were prepared, the union instead invoked a little-used procedure to refer the program to the ballot, which had the effect of halting the program's implementation. A legal battle ensued over whether the procedure was applicable, with the union prevailing.

At that point, though months short of the actual vote, the battle was over. The bill's opponents had moved the issue into the arena that is more favorable to them than the courts or legislatures: the voting booth. In that forum, when they are challenging programs that are not yet operational, the unions have never lost. In as many as ten ballot contests initiated by school choice proponents or referred to the ballot by unions, the opponents have prevailed in every one—even a Washington State referendum on charter schools in 2004—by resounding margins.

That record is not the result of unequal resources—Silicon Valley entrepreneur Tim Draper poured $20 million into a California initiative several years ago, and the Utah coalition reportedly spent $4 million, only half a million less than the unions—but rather of operating in the realm of the hypothetical. All the unions have to do is raise the specter that public schools may be harmed, and the electorate is likely to vote no.

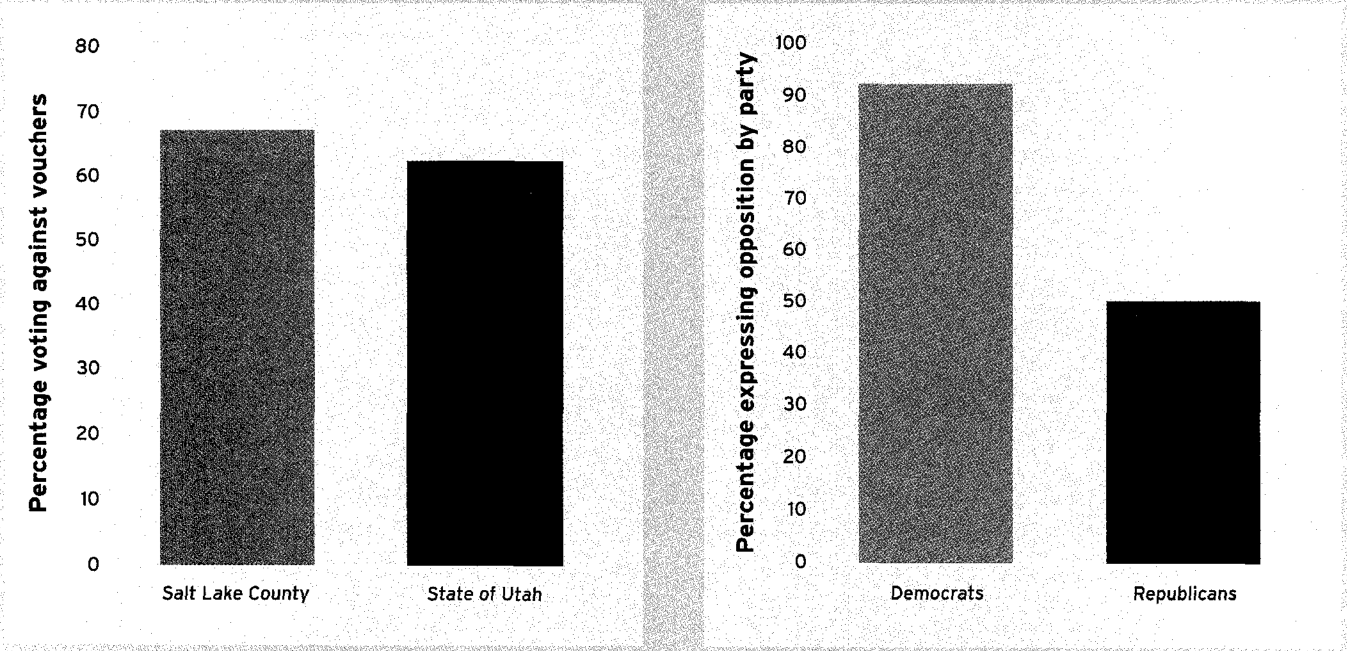
All of the anti–school choice ballot campaigns have struck consistent themes. Utah choice opponents ran television advertisements warning about the demise of public schools should the initiative pass. One ad featured Utah's "teacher of the year," who worried that vouchers would "take resources from the public schools." The furiously anti–school choice *Salt Lake Tribune* questioned the initiative backers' motives, charging that these "adherents to the philosophy of the late Milton Friedman have tried for years not just to undermine public schools, but to eliminate them." Other arguments focused on the issues of accountability for voucher schools and separation of church and state.

PCE and its allies, including the Sutherland Institute, a free-market policy group, gamely parried the charges, pointing to the poor performance of minority students in Utah public schools, explaining that public schools would lose students but keep most of their funding, and so on. The local school-choice team made some mistakes, too, most notably refraining from countering the signature-gathering effort with an advertising campaign that could have cast doubt on the nature and goals of the opposition. But overall, the campaign in support of vouchers was well run.

Regardless, in the end, 62 percent of Utah voters cast their votes against school choice (see Figure 1). Supporters failed to carry a single county. Opposition was even higher in Salt Lake County, an urban area where students were performing especially poorly.

Politics in Utah (Figure 1)

There was somewhat less opposition to vouchers across Utah as a whole than in the urban center of Salt Lake County, a traditionally Democratic area. Democratic voters opposed the bill, while Republicans divided equally.



SOURCE: State of Utah; Federal Election Commission

SOURCE: Utah Voter Poll 2007, conducted by the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy (CSED) at Brigham Young University

The Milwaukee Model

The school choice movement is remarkably diverse in nearly every way, not the least in differences over goals. Disputes center around universal versus means-tested school choice, tax credits versus vouchers, and other issues. But most school choice advocates have set aside such disputes in specific instances so long as the ball is moved forward.

Where differences are increasing is on strategy, and the movement divides between those who favor an incrementalist approach and those who prefer bigger, bolder action. Considering that the movement is animated by a belief in individual choice, it is surprising how many advocates believe there is one right way to deliver school choice, and one right strategy to achieve it.

Among those who favor a one-size-fits-all approach, the Milwaukee voucher program is the preeminent model. It has endured stiff legal and political challenges and today provides educational opportunities for tens of thousands of disadvantaged schoolchildren. Yet Milwaukee has proven remarkably difficult to replicate. If only we concentrate the movement's resources on a handful of promising states, some assert, we can create new Milwaukees; moreover, lesser efforts should be put aside to pursue that overarching goal. The largest and longest-running cloning initiative is in Texas, where over the past decade school choice advocates have invested tens of millions of dollars in political and legislative campaigns to create a large multicity voucher program, each time failing to pass any legislation.

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Raise the specter that public schools will be harmed, and voters are almost certain to vote "No."

The replicationists, for lack of a better term, miss two important points. The first is that all school-choice politics are local. Each state's political, legal, demographic, and cultural environments define the possible. In one state, vouchers for kids in failing schools might present a viable option, while a special-needs voucher might be all that is feasible in another. A heavily Catholic state might favor tuition tax credits, while a state with large urban populations might prefer scholarship tax credits. The replicationists can summon at best mild enthusiasm for such cacophony, while incrementalists believe that at this embryonic stage in its development, the movement should promote every form of school choice and let a thousand flowers bloom.

The second insight is that the Milwaukee program was the product of an incrementalist approach. The original school-choice program enacted in 1990 was limited to one percent of the public school students and encompassed only nonsectarian private schools. The scope was limited because only a tiny program could be enacted.

Like subsequent school-choice initiatives, the Milwaukee program evolved in predictable ways. First, the program introduced consumers to the concept of school choice in a tangible rather than hypothetical way. Families watched as others enrolled their children in good schools, and demand grew to expand the effort. Those whose children entered the program developed a stake in defending it. New schools opened to meet increasing parental demand, and the program expanded to more than 20 times its original student eligibility (to 22,500 students), along with the inclusion of religious school options. Most important, the myths that can bedevil school choice were replaced by reality, leading even the city's major daily newspaper to switch its editorial position from opposition to support. When the inevitable political challenge came in the form of a governor dead set on destroying school choice, the movement was so powerful that it forced the governor to capitulate and even sign an expansion. Milwaukee exemplifies the success and endurance of the incrementalist approach.

Indeed, the incrementalist approach has fueled nearly all the movement's legislative triumphs, yielding the single most important insight for future school-choice strategy: choice begets choice. Even the smallest programs are worth pursuing because they can expand, lay the groundwork for additional efforts, or both.

Future Prospects

Does the Utah defeat spell the end of vouchers, or even a slowing of momentum? While any defeat administered so decisively when victory seems at hand is inevitably discouraging, the national impact of the setback should not be exaggerated. After all, similar ballot defeats in California and Michigan have not prevented progress, however tortoiselike, in other states. But to generate faster movement, we need to focus on tactics that register enduring successes. Otherwise, the school choice movement is no more likely to win its struggle than the Super Bowl is going to be won by a series of long tosses into the end zone. But if first downs are ground out a few yards at a time, eventually we will see the goal line pass beneath our feet.

Since 2000, the number of jurisdictions with programs targeted toward disadvantaged youngsters has grown from four to ten (nine states plus the District of Columbia). Two programs started with vouchers for low-income children or students in failing schools, four with scholarship tax credits, and two with vouchers for kids with special needs. Some observations about this growth are worth noting. First, in terms of outcomes produced compared to dollars invested by the school choice movement, legislative success in the form of new or increased programs was *much* more likely to occur in states that already had some type of school choice program than in states that had none. Ohio, for instance, built upon the Cleveland program by enacting a statewide initiative for children in failing schools, while Arizona added to its individual scholarship tax-credit program with a corporate tax-credit and two new targeted voucher programs. Second, the growth rate has been greatest in programs that have reached their initial caps. Finally, Democratic governors and legislators (such as Pennsylvania's Edward Rendell and Wisconsin's Jim Doyle) are more likely to agree to expand existing programs, or (like Arizona's Janet Napolitano and the heavily Democratic Rhode Island state legislature) to approve small new ones, than they are to support large new projects.

Utah's strategy started out as an incrementalist approach, but the Carson Smith special-needs program was too new and too small to dispel concerns that Utahns might have about universal vouchers. A modest next step—such as a program targeted to disadvantaged children, who generally perform poorly in inner-city schools—might not have evoked a referendum, and if it did, likely would not have fared so badly.

Currently, the state with possibly the brightest prospects for school choice is Arizona, where choice through charter schools, open public school enrollment, scholarship tax credits, and special-needs voucher programs has made it all but impossible for opponents to demonize school choice. When Governor Napolitano pushed a full-day public-school kindergarten program, she referred to it as a "choice" program (families could choose whether or not to participate). Though antagonistic to school choice, she signed the voucher bills and allowed the corporate scholarship tax credit to become law without her signature. Should a Republican succeed Napolitano as governor, universal school choice could occur either as a result of legislation or even by voter initiative, as the number of program beneficiaries begins to eclipse the tally of teachers union members.

The most important insight for future school-choice strategy: choice begets choice.

A state like Louisiana—with a newly elected, passionately pro–school choice governor, a legislature that has passed school choice with bipartisan support, a lousy inner-city public-school system, a long tradition of Catholic schools serving disadvantaged students, and no constitutional obstacles—may eventually present an opportunity for a sustainable large program, though the Utah experience cautions against overreaching in the short run. A state like Missouri, with support from minority legislators but opposition from rural Republicans, may at best be able to enact a small targeted program at the outset. The ultimate goal in either case remains the same: education funding that follows children to the school of their choice, with schools as the means rather than ends in themselves.

One bedrock lesson of warfare is that armies never should outpace their supply lines. That is the mistake that was made in Utah. Though school choice should be as American as apple pie, as with any type of change people may find it scary, especially when the issue is the education of children. People may know the status quo is bad, but fear that the unknown may be worse.

In the case of school choice, familiarity breeds demand. When it moves from hypothesis to reality, choice is increasingly difficult for opponents to distort. The faces of real children in good schools are the best reason to expand and sustain programs—and the best defense against the inevitable efforts to dismantle them.

Clint Bolick served as president of the Alliance for School Choice from 2004 to 2007. He is now director of the Scharf-Norton Center for Constitutional Litigation at the Goldwater Institute and a research fellow with the Hoover Institution.

JUDY MIKUTA PHOTO: SIMON HAYTER; ARTHUR WISE PHOTO: DAVID HALLOWAY / GETTY IMAGES

Teachers For America

Catalysts for change or untrained temporaries?

Schools across the nation are confronting the challenge to place an effective teacher in every classroom. In the provisions of No Child Left Behind, alternative licensure programs, and teacher pay plans, education reformers seek ways to improve the quality of the nation's teaching workforce. One landmark effort to tackle this issue is Teach For America (TFA). The initiative famously launched by 22-year-old Wendy Kopp and a small cadre of allies in 1990 has brought thousands of talented young people into teaching. In this forum, *Education Next* asks Julie Mikuta and Arthur Wise whether Teach For America is a valuable strategy for recruiting the best and brightest into education and energizing school improvement, or a distraction and a device for sending ill-prepared neophytes to serve some of the nation's neediest students.

EDUCATION NEXT: Has Teach For America (TFA) improved the caliber of candidates entering the teaching workforce or has it undermined teacher professionalism?

ARTHUR WISE: Founder Wendy Kopp's call to public service has resonated with a generation of graduates of the nation's leading universities. She has designed and implemented a program that 1) attracts additional talented young adults to serve some of our lowest-performing schoolchildren, 2) places them in hard-to-staff schools with two-year commitments, 3) prepares them for this daunting task with a five-week summer institute, and 4) plays some role in their induction. TFAers are a potentially valuable resource to our schools.

Whether TFA has in fact "improved the caliber of candidates," however, depends on the criterion used to make the judgment.

TFA was designed to help solve the "teacher shortage" in "under-resourced" urban and rural schools and should be measured against this objective.

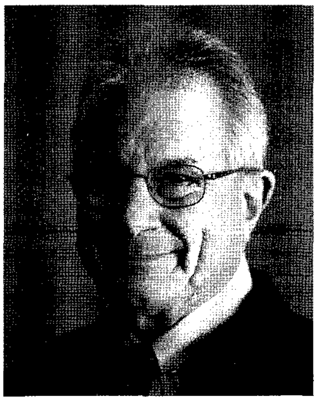
Most well-off suburban school districts, and even urban schools serving privileged students, generally manage to attract and retain the teachers they need. With few exceptions (e.g., STEM [science, engineering, and mathematics] fields and special education), these districts hire only career-oriented, fully certified teachers, do not face annual challenges in finding replacements, and do not turn to TFA.

High-needs urban and rural schools, on the other hand, offer their teachers extremely challenging students, unusually poor working conditions, and compensation unresponsive to market conditions even within the teaching profession. At-risk children in these schools are taught year after year by a passing parade of neophytes with varying degrees of preparation.

Education Next
talks to
JULIE MIKUTA
and
ARTHUR WISE

JULIE MIKUTA

is a partner at NewSchools Venture Fund. Her Teach For America experience includes teaching high school science in New Orleans and serving as vice president of alumni affairs.



ARTHUR E. WISE

is president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and co-author of A License to Teach, *a detailed plan for the professionalization of teaching.*

The absence of accomplished veterans to guide beginners exacerbates the challenge: Students enter school behind their peers. Their teachers have not yet learned to be effective. Although TFA corps members do perform a short-term public service by filling vacancies in hard-to-staff schools, they deflect attention from the lack of trained and experienced teachers who should be filling those seats. The problem of underresourced and underserved public schools serving the underperforming students is a continuing national tragedy, thus far unsolved by local, state, or national initiatives.

Professions normally have common programs of preparation and extended terms of practice. TFA does not fit the professional model of teaching; other professions do not assign novices primary responsibility.

JULIE MIKUTA: One way to measure whether TFA has improved the caliber of teaching candidates is to take a close look at TFA's own applicant pool. Traditionally, education majors have had some of the lowest SAT and GRE (Graduate Record Examination) scores, while the most-accomplished college students opted for careers in medicine, law, finance, or technology. TFA's reputation for quality and selectivity has reversed this equation by creating a mindset on college campuses that teaching in a high-needs school is a highly desirable postcollege job. Roughly 10 percent of graduating seniors at Duke University and the University of Chicago applied to TFA last fall, as well as 11 percent of those at Spelman College, an historically black liberal arts college. The average grade-point average of the 2,900 TFA accepted corps members was 3.6; their average SAT score was above 1300. Nearly all held leadership positions on campus. As Negar Azimi pointed out in the *New York Times* (September 30, 2007), "Doing good has rarely been this hip—or this competitive."

In general, the traits that TFA considers—including academic performance, verbal ability, and strong records of early leadership—line up with the traits found to correlate with teachers' success. However, it has proved frustratingly difficult to compare teachers' actual effectiveness in the classroom, because as a field, we too often rely on proxies like certification and tenure instead of on data that quantify teachers' impact on student achievement.

To address this challenge, TFA relentlessly collects, analyzes, and uses data about the performance of the students in the classes taught by individuals trained through the program and has found that many of their teachers help students achieve at least a year's worth of growth every year.

EN: Studies have shown that most TFA teachers leave the classroom after two to three years. Is that too short a time to have an impact in TFA's targeted, troubled districts?

AW: Although many recruits with TFAers' university backgrounds have great potential as teachers, few of them stay in teaching long enough to realize any advantage from those backgrounds. TFA recruits are a different "brand" of recruit from those who have invested time and money to prepare for a career of teaching. They seem to view their time in the classroom as community service; studies by Boyd and Grossman and by Kane and Rockoff have found that more than 80 percent are gone after three years.

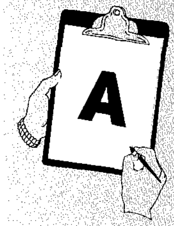
The introduction of TFA recruits to teaching is not easy. As a September 2007 *Washingtonian* article on the new D.C. superintendent of schools Michelle Rhee (a TFA alumna) summarizes, "her first year of teaching was a disaster.... 'I did not do right by the kids.... It was rough going.' She says she couldn't control the classroom; she spent her time disciplining, not teaching; she finished the year demoralized."

Of course, every experienced teacher was once a novice, so not every student can have an experienced instructor. But there is almost universal agreement on the value of teacher experience, and research indicates a multiplier effect on students' performance when they are taught by ineffective teachers over multiyear periods.

JM: Any measure of TFA teachers' impact must begin with the environments in which they work. The 26 regions into which TFA

Testing Teach For America (Figure 1)

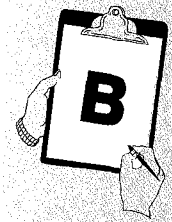
Studies of TFA teachers vary widely in both their findings and the strength of their methodologies.



Paul T. Decker, Daniel P. Mayer, and Steven Glazerman. The Effects of Teach For America on Students: Findings from a National Evaluation. Mathematica Policy Research, 2004

Methodology Rating: A

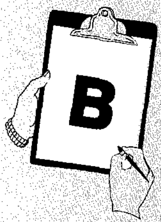
Central Findings: *After one year, students taught by TFA teachers outperformed students in control classrooms by 0.15 standard deviations in mathematics; no differences were observed in reading. TFA teachers outperformed not only other novice teachers but also veteran and certified teachers in the same schools. The study was conducted in 6 of 15 regions where TFA placed instructors.* ☆☆☆



Thomas J. Kane, Jonah E. Rockoff, and Douglas O. Staiger. What Does Certification Tell Us About Teacher Effectiveness? Evidence from New York City. National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER Working Paper 12155, 2006

Methodology Rating: B

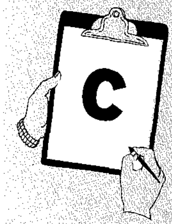
Central Findings: *Controlling for teacher experience, New York City students taught by TFA teachers scored 0.02 standard deviations higher than students taught by certified teachers. No differences were observed in reading.* ☆☆



Donald Boyd, Pamela Grossman, Hamilton Lankford, Susanna Loeb, and James Wyckoff. How Changes in Entry Requirements Alter the Teacher Workforce and Affect Student Achievement. Education Finance and Policy, Vol. 1, No. 2, Spring 2006

Methodology Rating: B

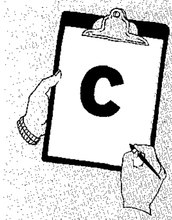
Central Findings: *Based on limited data from New York City, the authors found that students taught by first-year TFA teachers scored 0.03 standard deviations lower in reading than students of certified teachers in their first year. No differences were observed in math or for TFA teachers in their second year.* ☆



Margaret Raymond, Stephen Fletcher, and Javier Luque. Teach For America: An Evaluation of Teacher Differences and Student Outcomes in Houston, Texas. Center for Research on Education Outcomes, Stanford University, 2001

Methodology Rating: C

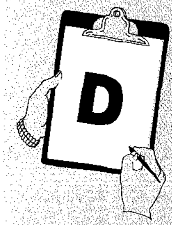
Central Findings: *Elementary school students in Houston were observed to have made gains on the state math test that were 0.12 deviations greater if they had a TFA teacher rather than another new teacher, some of whom were uncertified. Positive impacts from TFA were also observed in reading, but those were not statistically significant.* ☆☆☆☆



Linda Darling-Hammond, Deborah Holtzman, Su Jin Gatlin, and Julian Vasquez Heilig. Does Teacher Preparation Matter? Evidence about Teacher Certification, Teach For America, and Teacher Effectiveness. Education Policy Analysis Archives, Vol. 13, No. 42, Oct. 12, 2005

Methodology Rating: C

Central Finding: *Using data from additional tests administered in Houston and comparing TFA teachers only to fully certified teachers, negative impacts from TFA were observed on four of six tests. Positive effects from TFA were again observed on the state test in math.* ☆☆



Ildiko Laczko-Kerr and David C. Berliner. The Effectiveness of "Teach for America" and Other Under-certified Teachers on Student Academic Achievement: A Case of Harmful Public Policy. Education Policy Analysis Archives, Vol. 10, No. 37, Sept. 6, 2002

Methodology Rating: D

Central Finding: *Observational study that lacks critical information.* ☆

***Education Next* Methodology Ratings**

A = Randomized field trial or quasi-experimental
B = Observational study, large sample, detailed controls
C = Observational study, inadequate controls
D = Observational study, inappropriate control group

***Education Next* Central Finding Ratings**

☆☆☆☆ = All impacts of intervention positive and statistically significant.
☆☆☆= Some impacts are positive, while others not statistically significant.
☆☆ = Mixture of positive and negative impacts or no statistically significant impacts are observed.
☆ = All statistically significant impacts are negative.

places corps members include rural communities that struggle to lure enough teachers and urban neighborhoods that often lose their strongest teachers to the surrounding suburbs. This is the gap that TFA corps members step into. When I taught high school science as a TFA corps member in New Orleans, the science classroom next to mine was staffed midyear with a former band instructor because the school could not find a qualified science teacher to take the job.

Still, the question of how much impact any teacher can have in just two to three years is valid, especially given the research indicating that the largest growth in teacher effectiveness occurs during the first three years of teaching. But the first few years in the classroom can be ones of major impact. Yes, Michelle Rhee acknowledged that the eight-year-olds she taught in her first year "ran right over" her. However, as reported by the *New York Times*, by the end of her second year, students who had scored in the 13th percentile soared to grade level, with some students scoring in the 90th percentile. Rhee isn't unique: TFA recruits many individuals who are able to figure out how to make those two years matter greatly to the students they teach, and equips them to help their students succeed academically.

TFA RECRUITS ARE PLACEHOLDERS IN TROUBLED SCHOOLS WHERE AN ADULT MUST STAFF THE CLASSROOM AND NO ONE ELSE VOLUNTEERS. –AW

EN: Is there any compelling evidence that TFA teachers are more or less effective than traditionally certified teachers (see Figure 1)?

JM: External research has validated TFA's findings on teacher effectiveness: a June 2004 study by Mathematica Policy Research found that TFA teachers perform at least as well as traditionally prepared and certified teachers in similar schools, while a 2006 study published in *Education Next* (see Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger, "Photo Finish," *research*, Winter 2007) found the same to be true in New York City.

The Mathematica Policy Research study of the effectiveness of TFA teachers was very sophisticated. Mathematica worked across six different high-poverty areas (ranging from the rural Mississippi Delta to urban Chicago) to randomly assign almost 2,000 students to 100 TFA and non-TFA classrooms. They then used common pre- and post-tests to get apples-to-apples results across these classrooms and geographies. The study found that students with TFA teachers attained greater gains in math and equal gains in reading compared with students of other teachers in the study, even those with certified teachers and with veteran teachers.

The impact on student achievement is the most important metric, but it is also instructive to consider the opinions of TFA corps members' employers, who observe their practices day to day. Each year, TFA contracts with an external researcher to survey these principals, and year after year the majority of principals rate TFA teachers' preparation and performance as at least as effective as that of other beginning teachers, and in many cases as even better than the overall teaching faculty. Additionally, some of the highest-achieving charter schools, like Achievement First, choose to staff their schools with TFA corps members. While these data are certainly subjective, they are yet another indicator that TFA has built a track record of preparing successful teachers.

AW: At least five studies include data on TFA. The 2004 Mathematica study says that "TFA teachers did not have an impact on average reading achievement. Students in TFA and control classrooms experienced the same growth rate in reading achievement—an increase equivalent to one percentile" [from the 14th to the 15th percentile]. In addition, many of the TFA teachers were actually more prepared than over half in the novice control group: "All TFA teachers had at least 4 weeks of student teaching, while many of the control teachers (and over half the novice control teachers) had no student teaching experience at all." The abysmally low percentage of students at the proficiency level in both reading and math in this study demonstrates the results of the current policy of having inexperienced, untrained recruits teaching the most-needy students.

As a group, the studies tend to show that the students of uncertified TFA recruits underachieve when compared to students of new certified teachers, but this gap tends to disappear as the TFA recruits obtain professional knowledge through coursework and certification. Like similar studies in other areas of educational controversy, however, these results are indicative but not uniformly regarded as conclusive.

Whatever the relative performance of the two groups of new teachers, I know of no school or district that has made a conscious choice to hire TFA recruits instead of certified teachers. And the districts do not retain any substantial number of them long enough for the recruits to catch up to their peers. TFA recruits are placeholders in troubled schools where an adult must staff the classroom and no one else volunteers. They are hired because of the lack of certified applicants, not because they are considered more desirable.

EN: If TFA-like programs are going to improve teacher quality across the board, how should they be designed?

JM: When I was on the board of education for the D.C. public schools, I asked the person in charge of teacher induction how she determined which of the district's teachers had been successful during their first year of teaching. She looked at me, somewhat incredulously, and said, "I ask them if they had a good year." Her answer felt like a punch in the gut. Could it really be that the only way the district was assessing the quality of its teachers was to ask them if they liked the teaching experience? Is it possible that the experience of students didn't factor at all into this assessment? Reflecting back on that moment, I can say with sad certainty that this response wasn't unique to this individual or that district.

Every year colleges of education train thousands of teachers and send them into classrooms with very little understanding of whether that training was effective and what sort of achievement results these teachers will produce. Students would be much better off if policymakers and education leaders were to focus on student achievement results as a way to assess teacher quality overall, and to assess the quality of teacher preparation programs supported by federal and state dollars. TFA evaluates corps members' performance by determining which teachers produced student gains of 1.5 years of achievement growth over the course of the school year. TFA has had to figure out how to assess teachers' performance in subjects and grades that aren't tested and how to compare results across state lines, where the quality and rigor of tests vary dramatically. At the heart of this effort is a focus on producing "significant gains" in student achievement and creating support systems aligned with that goal. This model marks a huge development in teacher assessment and support strategies.

TFA also regularly mines its data to figure out how it can select the individuals most likely to produce that sought-after 1.5 years of growth per year and how to tailor its training to best support teachers toward that end. TFA spends approximately $19,000 per corps member for training and ongoing support and development. This covers a rigorous five-week summer training institute with opportunities for practice, observation, coaching, and study, as well as support on planning skills and reflection toward a cycle of continuous improvement; a two-year program of teacher support and professional development, including a formal cycle of observations and feedback, and data-driven, student-achievement-focused tool kits; and help with placement and ongoing coaching over the two years from regional staff.

School districts hire TFA corps members through state-approved alternative certification programs, which require that corps members meet specific requirements. These vary by region and by position, but in most cases they call for corps members to pass subject-area tests before teaching and to take ongoing coursework during the school year. Teach For America works with school districts, states, and schools of education to ensure that corps members have access to coursework, test information, and preparation tools to meet these requirements. In many regions, TFA has established partnerships with graduate schools that enable corps members to obtain their master's degrees in education.

STUDENTS WOULD BE MUCH BETTER OFF IF POLICYMAKERS AND EDUCATION LEADERS WERE TO FOCUS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RESULTS AS A WAY TO ASSESS TEACHER QUALITY OVERALL, AND TO ASSESS THE QUALITY OF TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS. –JM

IT IS WORTHWHILE FOR OUR NATION'S FUTURE DOCTORS, LAWYERS, AND POLICYMAKERS TO WITNESS FIRSTHAND THE CHALLENGES TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ENCOUNTER IN THESE POOR URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES. – JM

AW: The sad reality is that our hard-to-staff schools will continue to have a disproportionate number of new teachers until we stop the hemorrhaging of their staff. We need a sharp break with tradition. Even certified teachers who have completed education-school coursework and student teaching need a structured induction program in order to become effective teachers. The need for training and supervision is even greater for recruits entering the field without any prior pedagogical training or experience, no matter how smart, dedicated, or steeped in subject-matter knowledge they may be. To be effective, all prospective teachers need a deep understanding of the subject matter, child development, and language development and sophisticated strategies for teaching content to diverse learners, managing the classroom, and assessing both how children learn and what they are learning.

I recommend a "teaching team strategy," that gives only experienced teachers primary student responsibility, but in multiple classrooms and with the assistance of the novices. Senior teachers, appropriately compensated, lead instructional teams of other teachers, novices, and untrained personnel.

Since this very radical reform is unlikely to occur in the near future, we must for now at least insist that TFA recruits not only attend an intensive preservice summer institute but also receive structured mentoring that is uniformly as good in practice as on paper. They should be required to work toward certification while they are in the classroom.

In an ideal world, all new teachers would receive their capstone preparation and induction in a professional development school or an urban residency program. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has worked to improve professional development schools, which provide preparation and teaching experience. Three hundred of NCATE's 650 accredited schools of education have a total of 750 professional development schools, each training 15 to 40 individuals each year. Studies published by NCATE (Teitel 2004) and by the American Educational Research Association (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005) indicate that structured student teaching and internships in professional development schools increase the likelihood that novices remain in teaching, even in urban schools, and improve the performance of their students.

Recently, NCATE has begun working with urban residency programs, which pursue a similar strategy for those who have not been prepared as teachers. Existing programs include the Academy for Urban School Leadership in Chicago (training 53 this year), the Boettcher Teachers Program in Denver (16), and the Boston Teacher Residency, which currently (2007–08) has 84 participants and plans to have 100 to 120 candidates next year. One-half of Boston candidates are people of color; one-half of the candidates are in shortage fields of math and science.

Professional development schools currently provide more new teachers than TFA does each year, and urban residency programs are growing rapidly. These schools and programs should be receiving the lion's share of policy attention, but unfortunately neither has a charismatic leader such as Wendy Kopp. These programs are not yet brought to scale, with the exception of Maryland, which requires all of its candidates to be trained in a professional development school. Other states could follow Maryland's example. We hope they do.

An intermediate step could be the New York City Teaching Fellows program. Although this program does assign uncertified recruits as teachers of record, it also requires them to enroll concurrently in a master's degree program focusing on teaching and learning.

TFA currently invests approximately $20,000 per recruit for a two-year teaching commitment. If the same amount were invested as a full stipend for a one-year Master of Arts in teaching program at a state university, America could reap more benefits over a longer period of time.

EN: Many TFA supporters point to the spinoffs launched by TFA alums, including The New Teacher Project (TNTP), the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), and YES Prep and argue that many of those who initially entered education through TFA have gone on to

become influential change agents. How convincing is the evidence for this?

JM: If TFA did not exist, it is highly doubtful that the 2005 National Teacher of the Year Jason Kamras, who taught for nine years in the Washington, D.C., public school system, would have become a teacher. The same goes for Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, who went on to create KIPP based on principles for effective schooling that they first developed while they were TFA corps members. Today, KIPP's schools catapult low-income students from the 30th percentile in math to the 70th or 80th, positioning them for success in high school and beyond. Because of TFA, KIPP schools are delivering an incredible education to more than 14,000 low-income students of color during this school year alone, and many of these students are being taught directly by current TFA corps members or alumni.

Add to the mix the impact of alumni like Mikara Solomon, who as principal of Bunche Elementary School in Compton, a very low income community in Los Angeles, led its transformation from one of the district's lowest-ranked schools to one of the best performers, and the long-term impact of TFA alumni on students in low-income communities begins to emerge. TFA estimates that more than 280 of its alumni lead district or charter schools. At least 67 percent of alums continue to work or study full-time in education; half of these alumni are teachers.

TFA has also had an impact on district practices, much of which comes through the work of its alumni. The current administration of the D.C. Public Schools is staffed at the highest levels by TFA alumni who have remained committed to public education. The New Teacher Project has partnered with over 200 school districts in 32 states to recruit and prepare 23,000 teachers. Many of TNTP's staff are TFA alumni as well; they sit side by side with human resources personnel to help fix broken recruiting and hiring systems that prevent the neediest schools from getting the best candidates. TFA alumnus Cami Anderson is superintendent of New York City's district of Alternative Schools and Programs, where she oversees the educational needs of 50,000 young people at a variety of facilities, including transfer schools and correctional education facilities. In nearby New Jersey, alumnus Brian Osborne is the superintendent of the 6,000-student Maplewood-South Orange school district. And in Chicago, Michael Lach wields significant influence on district policy as director of science for Chicago Public Schools.

While I was head of alumni for TFA, each year about 90 percent of alumni indicated in an annual survey that they work, volunteer, or pursue graduate studies in fields that directly affect low-income communities. Whether they work inside or outside a school system, they bring a passion and sense of outrage that come from having spent at least two years learning about the challenges that low-income students and schools face.

AW: These talented graduates, most from fortunate backgrounds, complete their TFA commitments with direct experience trying to help the nation's less fortunate population learn and then they move on. Small minorities have remained in education (it appears mostly in policy positions) and have a direct opportunity to make a difference in the status quo. Michelle Rhee, for example, first used her TFA experience to develop The New Teacher Project in a parallel attempt to increase teacher quality in urban areas by recruiting new types of teachers, and now to help improve one of the nation's worst-performing urban districts.

Some TFA graduates are already becoming part of the next generation of society's leaders, and many more will surely follow. They have directly experienced the teacher quality conundrum in hard-to-staff schools, and they will presumably be willing to advocate for new approaches to ameliorate the problems of underresourced schools and underserved children.

EN: How many teachers would TFA need to prepare every year for the program to have a significant, even transformative, effect on urban education?

AW: Six hundred fifty NCATE-accredited schools graduate over 100,000 career-oriented

IN AN IDEAL WORLD, ALL NEW TEACHERS WOULD RECEIVE THEIR CAPSTONE PREPARATION AND INDUCTION IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL OR AN URBAN RESIDENCY PROGRAM. – AW

TFA INTENDS TO TRANSFORM PUBLIC EDUCATION BY EXPOSING THESE TALENTED PEOPLE TO THE CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION AND ENGAGING THEM IN FIGURING OUT SOLUTIONS.– JM

teaching candidates a year (about two-thirds of the total graduates of university-based teacher education programs). TFA hopes to provide 4,000 teachers a year—for two-year stints—by 2010. Even if it continues to concentrate its efforts on hard-to-staff urban schools, any significant systemic impact must necessarily be catalytic rather than proportional.

JM: The program was never intended to solve the teacher shortage problem or even to fix public education simply by preparing bright college students to teach for two years. Instead, TFA intends to transform public education by exposing these talented people to the challenges of public education and engaging them in figuring out solutions, and by concentrating its impact within certain markets. Nearly 45 percent of TFA's 12,000 alumni live in six regions—NYC, Chicago, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, the Bay Area, and Houston. As TFA grows, the organization's impact will increase, as these alumni take on more visible and influential roles.

EN: Ultimately, what would you say is the single biggest impact–positive or negative–that TFA has had on American schooling?

AW: Given its small size TFA's greatest positive impact may be the creation of a new generation of education and societal leaders with abiding interest and direct experience in the problems of educating our nation's disadvantaged. The nation needs their help.

Government must invest in and redesign underresourced urban and rural schools so that they consistently provide high-quality education for their students. Eliminating the teacher shortage in hard-to-staff schools will require changing economic incentives, working conditions, and staffing patterns so that these schools attract and retain a competent teaching force that will help all students learn.

Teachers' propensity to remain in a school depends heavily on their perception of teaching conditions and the degree to which they see the school environment supporting their teaching. Efforts to redesign hard-to-staff schools to provide attractive teaching conditions have been insufficient and inadequate.

Still I do not think any of us presumes to think that teachers will remain in positions as long as their predecessors did when many other types of occupations and professions were not open to women or people of color. There must be economic incentives, both relative to other professions and within the education profession, for career-oriented teachers to teach those students who most need their abilities and experience.

JM: There is no doubt that Teach For America has had a positive impact on American education. This impact has played out along two primary dimensions. First, the teachers it recruits are in fact good teachers who produce achievement gains for students that match or exceed those accomplished by other new teachers who have been prepared in other ways. Second, TFA has channeled thousands of talented people into education who might not otherwise have chosen this profession, and shown them what it takes to educate high-need students. Although TFA is by no means the entire solution to the problems facing public education, or even our teacher shortage, TFA is helping to redefine the educational and economic opportunities available in rural and urban communities.

Teach For America, by focusing all of its teachers on the singular goal of helping their students make more than one year's worth of growth in a single year, is proving that we have no excuse for the perennial underachievement of children from low-income communities. As corps members and as alumni, TFA teachers carry this torch into their careers in education, public service, and other sectors, lighting a fire under our public will that can ignite much-needed change in public education. Their work will augment the efforts of many others who are simultaneously working at all levels and in a variety of fields to make high-quality education the norm, regardless of the school a child attends. ■

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Education and

It's not just going to school, but learning

Even before and certainly ever since the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, national economic competitiveness has been offered as a primary reason for pushing school reform. The commission warned, "If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all—old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority." Responding to these urgent words, the National Governors Association, in 1989, pledged that U.S. students would lead the world in math and science achievement by 2000.

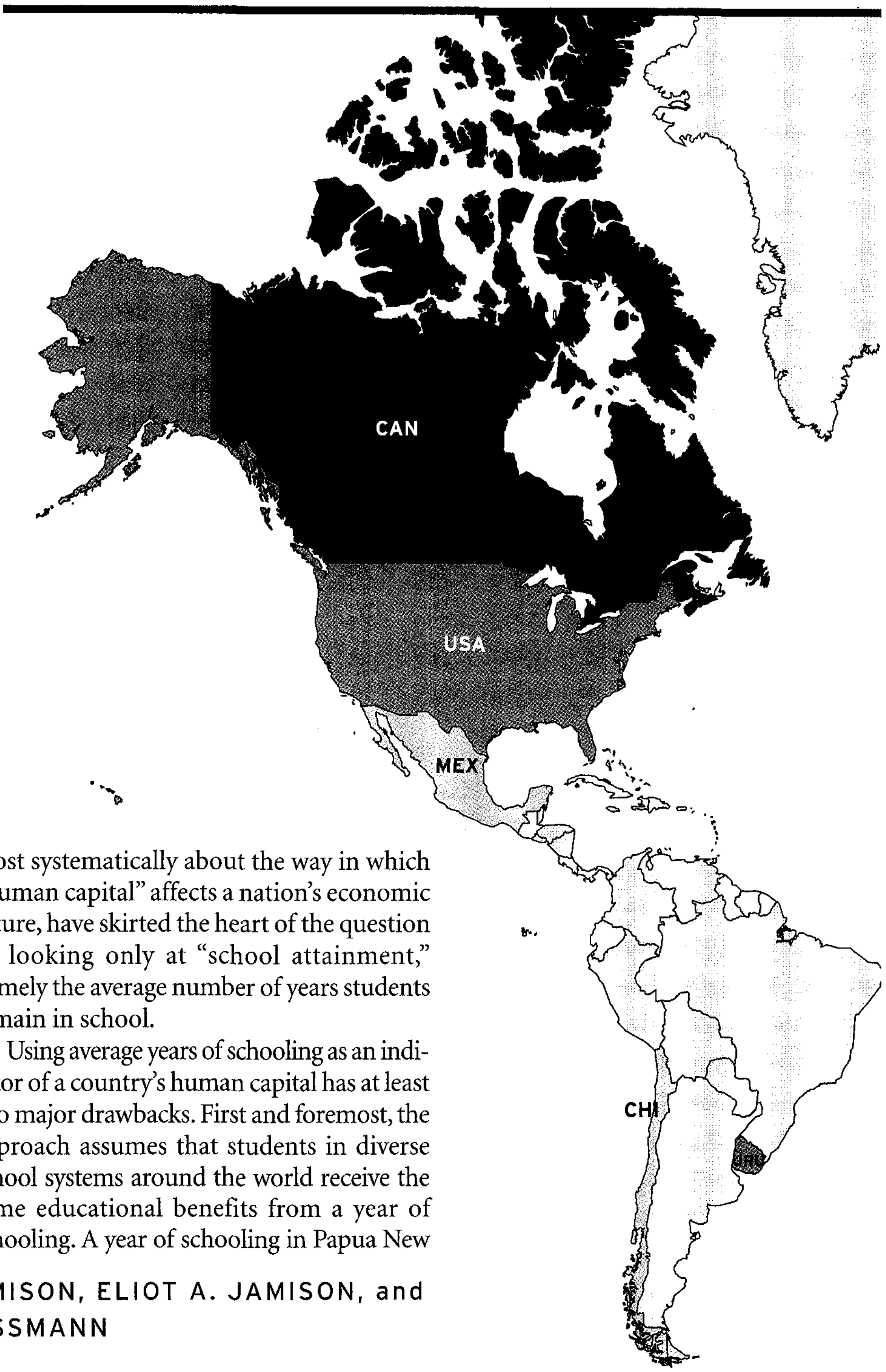
According to the latest international math and science assessment conducted by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (see Figure 1), the United States remains a long distance from that target. Rather than worrying about the consequences, some have begun to question what all the fuss was about. Education researcher Gerald Bracey, for example, has argued that no one has "provided any data on the relationship between the economy's health and the performance of schools. Our long economic boom suggests there isn't one—or that our schools are better than the critics claim."

Truth be told, the Bracey critique is not entirely misplaced. Most commentators rely more on the commonsense understanding that countries must have good schools to succeed economically rather than presenting conclusive empirical evidence that connects what students learn in school to what subsequently happens in a nation's economy. Even economists, the people who think the most systematically about the way in which "human capital" affects a nation's economic future, have skirted the heart of the question by looking only at "school attainment," namely the average number of years students remain in school.

Using average years of schooling as an indicator of a country's human capital has at least two major drawbacks. First and foremost, the approach assumes that students in diverse school systems around the world receive the same educational benefits from a year of schooling. A year of schooling in Papua New

BY ERIC A. HANUSHEK, DEAN T. JAMISON, ELIOT A. JAMISON, and LUDGER WOESSMANN

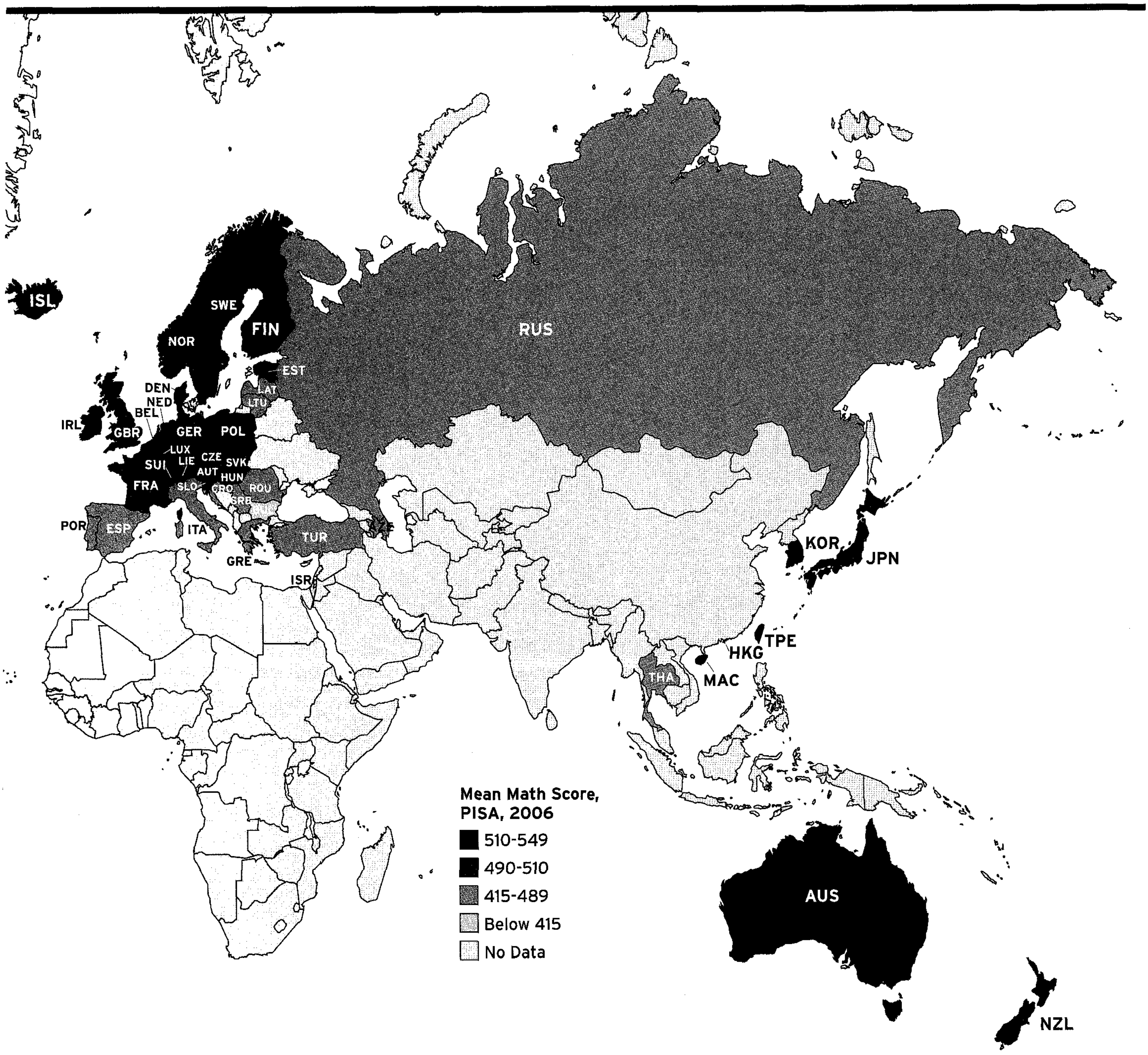
Stuck in the Middle (Figure 1) *U.S. students again fared poorly on the*



Economic Growth

something while there that matters

latest international test of math, placing 21st among the 32 OECD countries.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ESP
ITA
TUR
GRE
ISR
KOR
JPN
TPE
HKG
THA
MAC
AUS
NZL
Mean Math Score, PISA, 2006
510-549
490-510
415-489
Below 415
No Data

SOURCE: Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006

Guinea and a year of schooling in Japan are treated as equally productive. Second, this measure does not account for learning that takes place outside the classroom—within families, among peers, or via the Internet, for example.

A more direct measure of a country's human capital is the performance of students on tests in math and science, something that might be called the average level of "cognitive skills" among those entering a country's work force. At one time, internationally comparable information on student performance was not available for a sufficient number of countries over a long enough period of time to allow for systematic study, which is why economists relied upon the less informative measures of school attainment. Now that test-score data for many countries over an extended period of time are readily available, it is possible to supplement measures of educational attainment with these more direct measures of cognitive skills.

In a series of studies conducted over several years, the four of us have explored the role of both school attainment and cognitive skills in economic growth. Beginning in the mid-1960s, international agencies started conducting tests of students' performance in mathematics and science at various grade levels. We used performance on 12 of these standardized tests as rough measures of the average level of cognitive skill in a given country. With this information, we could assess how human capital relates to differences in economic growth for 50 countries from 1960 to 2000, more countries over a longer period of time than any previous study. We were also able to pay close attention to institutional factors that influence economic growth, such as openness of the economy and protection of property rights.

What we discovered gives credence to the concerns expressed in *A Nation at Risk*. The level of cognitive skills of a nation's students has a large effect on its subsequent economic growth rate. Increasing the average number of years of schooling attained by the labor force boosts the economy only when increased levels of school attainment also boost cognitive skills. In other words, it is not enough simply to spend more time in school; something has to be learned there.

We also discovered that the size of the impact of cognitive skills depends on whether a nation's economy is open to outside trade and other external influences. The more open the economy, the more important it is that a country's students are acquiring high levels of cognitive skills. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent or "flat," to use *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman's familiar terminology, enhancing human capital will become increasingly critical. As the world continues to change, the United States can ill afford to rest easily on its past accomplishments.

Measuring Cognitive Skills

Reaching these conclusions required a multistep analysis. The first step was to use the 12 PISA and other international math and science assessments, dating back to 1964, to construct an index of cognitive skill levels for a large sample of countries at various points in time. Because the number of countries participating in the 12 test administrations changed from one administration to the next, and because testing agencies have made no attempt to link their results to one another, we needed to develop comparable scores for each test. This required a norm against which each test could be calibrated. Fortunately, we could construct that norm by using information from tests in the United States, the country that has had the earliest, most sophisticated, and most comprehensive system of testing. The United States has participated in all of the international tests since 1964, and it has also maintained a separate longitudinal testing system of its own, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). With that information in hand, it was possible to calibrate scores on each of the separate international tests to one another via the connection of those tests to the NAEP. To obtain further precision, we used the variation in scores across a subset of the more-advanced developed

A more direct measure of a country's human capital is the performance of students on tests in math and science, something that might be called the average level of "cognitive skills" among those entering a country's work force.

Comparing Cognitive Skills (Figure 2)

For the first time, all international tests administered between 1964 and 2003 have been placed on a common scale, allowing readers to identify changes in test performances over time. Notice that students in the United States, Germany and Hungary have slipped, while students in the Netherlands and Finland have improved.

	1960s-1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
500s	Israel New Zealand Japan France Belgium Hungary Germany Australia Finland United Kingdom Sweden Netherlands	Japan Netherlands Korea, Rep. Hungary Hong Kong	Taiwan Korea, Rep. Japan Singapore Finland Slovak Rep. Czech Rep. Australia Slovenia Hong Kong Bulgaria Austria Russian Fed. Netherlands Hungary Sweden United Kingdom Belgium Canada	Finland Korea, Rep. Taiwan Japan Hong Kong Estonia Singapore Macao-China Canada Australia Netherlands Ireland Liechtenstein Switzerland Sweden New Zealand United Kingdom Belgium Austria Czech Rep. France
400s	Italy **United States** Thailand Chile India Iran	Finland France Norway Sweden Australia Poland Belgium United Kingdom Singapore Canada New Zealand Italy Israel **United States** Thailand Luxembourg Swaziland Nigeria Philippines	Switzerland **United States** France New Zealand Germany Norway Ireland Italy Iceland Yugoslavia Malaysia Denmark Latvia Spain Greece Lithuania Thailand Portugal Israel Romania Cyprus Trinidad&Tobago Moldova Macedonia Iran Colombia Jordan Nigeria Venezuela Kuwait Tunisia	Lithuania Hungary **United States** Iceland Germany Denmark Slovak Rep. Malaysia Latvia Poland Spain Italy Norway Russian Fed. Slovenia Greece Bulgaria Romania Portugal Moldova Luxembourg Israel Cyprus Armenia Serbia Jordan Turkey Uruguay Thailand Macedonia Colombia Iran Bahrain Argentina Palestine Mexico Egypt
300s	Malawi		Turkey Indonesia Zimbabwe Chile Botswana Philippines	Chile Lebanon Kuwait Indonesia Brazil Tunisia Albania Philippines Saudi Arabia Morocco Botswana Belize Peru
200s			South Africa Morocco	Ghana South Africa

Note: Countries are ordered by average test score received in one or more tests in reading, math, and science within the indicated decades. Countries with higher scores within a category appear in the left-hand column.

SOURCE: Authors

countries to obtain an estimate of the spread in scores across countries. By following these two steps, we were able to aggregate all available scores for each country into measures of average cognitive skill levels for each country.

The 50 countries for which we were able to develop a comparable measure of cognitive skill levels include the 30 democracies that have market economies and have been accepted as members of the OECD, most of which are at a relatively high level of economic development. The other 20 countries are at lower levels of economic development. In Figure 2, you can identify top performers like Finland and Japan, average performers such as the United States and Germany, and low performers that include Albania, the Philippines, and South Africa.

Impact on Economic Growth

We wanted to use this new information to compare the economic benefits of higher levels of just school attainment with the benefits of higher levels of cognitive skills. We therefore took measures of average educational attainment and average cognitive skill levels for as many countries as possible and examined their relationship to the average annual growth rate in the country's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita from 1960 through 2000.

First, we looked just at the impact of average school attainment on the economic growth rate. (An adjustment was made for the initial level of GDP because it is "easier" to grow if you are starting out at a lower level; that is, it is easier to copy more productive technologies than to initiate progress on your own.) When we performed this analysis, we found, as other economists before us, that when the average number of years of schooling in a country was higher, the economy grew at a higher annual rate over subsequent decades. Specifically, we found that, across the 50 countries, each additional year of average schooling in a country increased the average 40-year growth rate in GDP by about 0.37 percentage points.

A country benefits from asking its students to remain in school for a

consequence. In other words, higher levels of cognitive skill appear to play

That may not seem like much, but consider the fact that since World War II, the world economic growth rate has been around 2 to 3 percent of GDP annually. Lifting it by 0.37 percentage points is a boost to annual growth rates of more than 10 percent of what would otherwise have occurred, a significant amount.

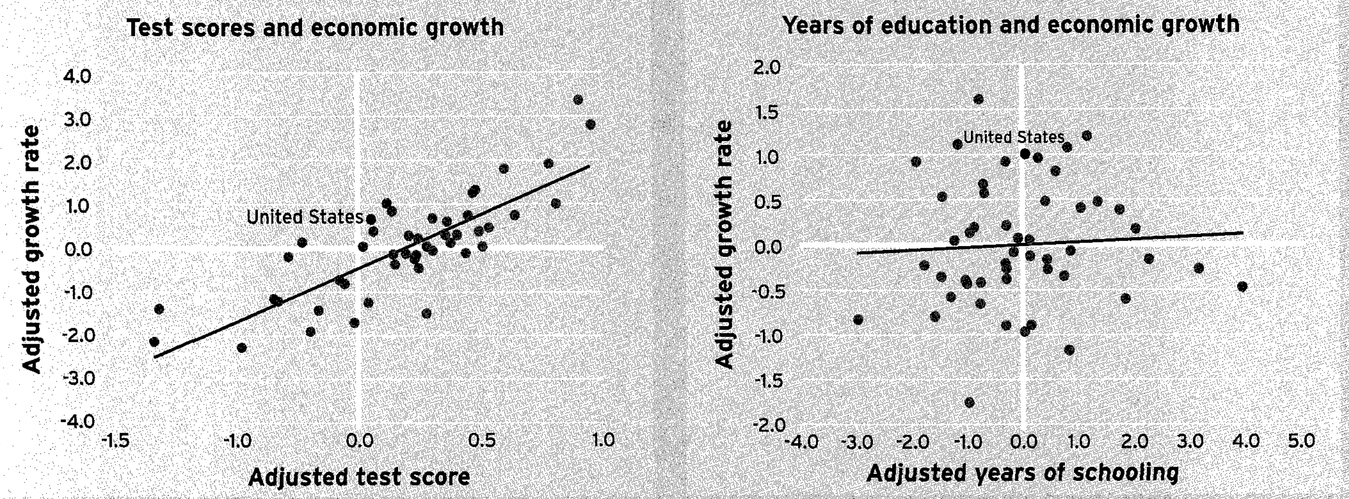
But the impact of improved cognitive skills, as measured by the performance of students on math and science tests, is considerably larger. When we performed the analysis again, this time also including the average test-score performance of a country in our model, we found that countries with higher test scores experienced far higher growth rates. If one country's test-score performance was 0.5 standard deviations higher than another country during the 1960s—a little less than the current difference in the scores between such top-performing countries as Finland and Hong Kong and the United States—the first country's growth rate was, on average, one full percentage point higher annually over the following 40-year period than the second country's growth rate. Further, once the impact of higher levels of cognitive skills are taken into account, the significance for economic growth of school attainment, i.e., additional years of schooling, dwindles to nothing (see Figure 3). A country benefits from asking its students to remain in school for a longer period of time only if the students are learning something as a consequence.

Another indication of the importance of education quality to economic growth lies in our ability to explain global variation in GDP growth. When we tried to account for economic growth with information only about school attainment levels and the level of a country's GDP in 1960, we were able to explain only one-quarter of the differences we saw among countries. But when we also included cognitive skills in our statistical models of economic growth, we were able to attribute nearly three-quarters of the differences among countries to these three factors. In other words, higher levels of cognitive skill appear to play a major role in explaining international differences in economic growth.

Of course, the initial level of economic development, schooling attainment, and cognitive skills are not the only factors that affect economic growth. Could it be that some other factor we have overlooked is responsible for the close connection between test scores and economic growth?

Explaining Economic Growth (Figure 3)

How much students learn, not how long they stay in school, is the key to economic growth. The United States, however, has had a higher growth rate during this period than would be expected given its test scores and levels of school attainment.



Note: The y-axis indicates growth rates from 1960 and 2000, adjusted for GDP in 1960 and school attainment. The x-axis shows test scores adjusted for school attainment. The solid line plots the relationship between the two variables among the 50 countries with available test score information, each of which is represented by a dot.

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SOURCE: Authors

Other economic research has identified two additional factors that affect a country's economic growth rate: the security of its property rights and its openness to international trade. When those two factors are taken into account, the positive effect of cognitive skills on annual economic growth becomes somewhat smaller, but is still 0.63 percentage points per half of a standard deviation of test scores. This is the best available estimate of the size of the impact of cognitive skills on economic growth.

Other commonly discussed determinants of economic growth are fertility and geography. However, when we took into account the total fertility rate and common geographical proxies, such as latitude or the fraction of the land area of a country that is located in the tropics, neither of these additional variables was significantly associated with economic growth.

longer period of time only if the students are learning something as a

a major role in explaining international differences in economic growth.

Once again, the strong effect of cognitive skills remained clear.

We performed a variety of additional tests to assess the validity of these basic results. For example, we estimated the relationships over shorter periods of time, used different subsets of international tests, and compared smaller groups of the 50 countries.

One of our tests was particularly interesting. We thought it possible that the effect of cognitive skills could be the result of the presence in our sample of East Asian countries, most of which have both high levels of cognitive skill and rapidly growing economies. To see whether the inclusion of those countries in our study influenced our results, we excluded them from one of our models. The impact of cognitive skill remained very powerful, albeit diminished.

> **Is it a few rocket scientists at the very top of the distribution who**
>
> **The answer, it seems, is not one or the other but both!**

We also looked at cognitive skills as measured in the 1960s through the mid-1980s to see what their impact was on growth between 1980 and 2000, ensuring that the cognitive skills themselves were not caused by the economic growth. Again, our basic findings remained intact. Finally, we looked at whether a country's estimated cognitive skills affected the earnings of immigrants working in the United States. Higher home country cognitive skills translated into higher earnings if the immigrants were educated in their homeland but not if educated in the United States.

Our commonsense understanding of the importance of good schools can thus be documented quite precisely. A highly skilled work force can raise economic growth by about two-thirds of a percentage point every year.

More Rocket Scientists or Basic Skills for All?

To gain additional insight into the relationship between cognitive skills and economic growth, we examined the separate impact of improvements at different levels of a nation's distribution of skills. Loosely speaking, is it a few "rocket scientists" at the very top of the distribution who spur economic growth, or is it "education for all" that is needed?

To address this question, we measured the share of students in each country who reach a threshold of basic competency in mathematics and science, as well as the share of students who perform at very high levels. To estimate the importance of basic competency, we identified the share of students performing at least at a very basic level, that is, no more than one standard deviation below the international average of all OECD countries. In the average OECD country in our study, 89 percent of the students achieved at least at this very basic level. The share of students with at least basic skills ranged widely among countries, from as low as 18 percent in Peru to 97 percent in the Netherlands and Japan. To show a country's ability to develop a large cadre of high-performing students, we identified the share of students performing at very high levels—at or above one standard deviation over the OECD average. On average across all countries, 6 percent of students performed at that high level. Once again, countries varied enormously in this respect, the percentage ranging from as low as 0.1 percent in Colombia and Morocco to 18 percent in Singapore and Korea and 22 percent in Taiwan.

Which is more important for growth—having a substantial cadre of high performers or bringing everyone up to a basic level of performance? The answer, it seems, is not one or the other but both! When we estimated the importance of each within the same model, we found each of them to be separately important to economic growth. That is, both the performance of countries in ensuring that almost all students achieve at basic levels and their performance in producing high-achieving students seem to matter.

The reasons that a substantial cadre of highly skilled citizens and near-universal basic skills matter are not difficult to imagine. Even if a country is simply making use of new technologies developed elsewhere, as is often the case in developing parts of the world, the more workers that have at least basic skills, the easier it will be for them to make use of those new technologies. Some workers need a high level of skill so they can help adapt the new technologies to their countries' particular situation. In countries on the technological frontier, substantial numbers of scientists, engineers, and other innovators are obviously needed. But so is a labor force that has the basic skills needed to survive in a technologically driven economy.

But even if the results seem intuitively correct, they should be taken as suggestive rather than definitive, because the two measures of cognitive skills are closely related to one another and our models have difficulty in separating out the precise impact of each individually. Most countries that have a high percentage of students with very high cognitive skills also are ones in which basic skills are near universal. Conversely, countries with a substantial percentage of students lacking even basic skills tend to be those that have only a small percentage of highly skilled students. Still, that pattern is not a perfect one, so we are able, at least tentatively, to identify the impact of each type of human capital, and we are quite confident that we can recommend that countries both concentrate resources on their "best and brightest" and make sure that "no child is left behind."

None of this is meant to suggest that schooling is the only factor contributing to a society's cognitive skill development. Family, individual ability, and health combine with school quality to determine a student's level of achievement. Yet there is every reason to believe that the single best route to higher levels of cognitive skill is strengthening a country's education system. After all, most people think that is the system's primary purpose.

spur economic growth, or is it "education for all" that is needed?

The Impact of Becoming a World Leader

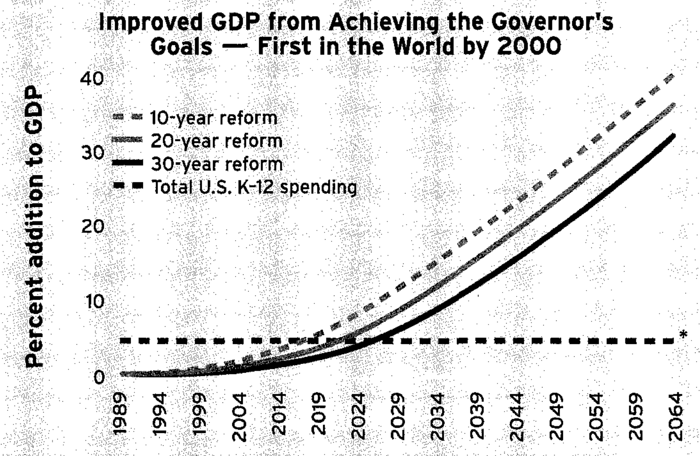
What would it mean for economic growth, then, if a country like the United States, currently performing somewhat below the average of OECD countries, managed to increase its performance by 50 points (or 0.5 standard deviations) so that it would score alongside the world leaders? (On average on the PISA 2006 math and science exams, countries such as Canada and Korea scored about 50 points higher than the U.S., Hong Kong and Taiwan about 60 points higher, and Finland as many as 74 points higher.) That increase of 50 test points is exactly what George H. W. Bush and the nation's governors together promised in 1989 the United States would achieve by the year 2000.

Unfortunately, no such gains were realized. But had the promise been fulfilled by 2000, our results suggest that GDP would by 2015 be 4.5 percent greater than in the absence of any such gains (see Figure 4). That 4.5 percent increment in GDP is equal to the total the U.S. currently spends on K–12 education. In other words, had that money effectively raised cognitive skills by the 50 test points that would have brought the United States close to world leadership, the economic returns to the country would probably have been enough to cover the entire cost of education in 2015 and after.

Figure 4 shows that the benefits of successful reform grow even more vivid when we look farther out. Over 75 years, even a reform that takes effect in 20 years (instead of the governors' 10 years) yields a real GDP that is 36 percent higher than it would be if there was no change in the level of cognitive skills.

The Economic Benefits of Reform (Figure 4)

Making American high school students the best in the world in math and science would have had a substantial impact on the nation's economic growth, enough to pay for the K–12 education system by 2015.



Note: *K-12 education expenditures are assumed to be constant at the level attained in 2005. These data show that economic benefits from a 1989 reform that raised the U.S. to the highest levels of test performance would cover the cost of K-12 education by 2015.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations

An American Exception?

The United States has never done well on international assessments of student achievement. Instead, its level of cognitive skills is only about average among the developed countries. Yet the country's GDP growth rate has been higher than average over the past century. If cognitive skills are so important to economic

Although the strengths of the U.S. economy and its higher-education system offer some hope for the future, the situation at the K-12 level should spark concerns about the long-term outlook for the U.S. economy.

growth, how can we explain the puzzling case of the U.S.?

Part of the answer is that the United States may be resting on its historic record as the world's leader in educational attainment. In addition, the United States has other advantages, some of which are entirely separate and apart from the quality of its schooling. The U.S. maintains generally freer labor and product markets than most countries in the world. There is less government regulation of firms, and trade unions are less powerful than in many other countries. Put more broadly, the U.S. has generally less intrusion of government in the operation of the economy, including lower tax rates and minimal government production through nationalized industries. Taken together, these characteristics of the U.S. economy encourage investment, permit the rapid development of new products and activities by firms, and allow U.S. workers to adjust to new opportunities.

Those economic institutions seem to matter on their own and in conjunction with cognitive skills. Our analyses suggest that the value of a high-quality education system is substantially diminished in closed economies. We estimate that the effect of a one-standard-deviation improvement in cognitive skills on annual economic growth is 0.9 percentage points per year in closed economies, identified by heavy restrictions on international trade, but 2.5 percentage points in open economies. It may be that rich human capital combines with a laissez-faire economy to foster robust economic growth.

It is also the case that, over the 20th century, the expansion of the U.S. education system outpaced the rest of the world. The U.S. pushed to open secondary schools to all citizens. Higher education expanded with the development of land grant universities, the GI Bill, and direct grants and loans to students. The extraordinary U.S. higher-education system is a powerful engine of technological progress and economic growth in the U.S. not accounted for in our analysis. By most evaluations, U.S. colleges and universities rank at the very top in the world.

Although the strengths of the U.S. economy and its higher-education system offer some hope for the future, the situation at the K–12 level should spark concerns about the long-term outlook for the U.S. economy, which could eventually have an impact on the higher-education system as well. The U.S. higher-education system may also be challenged by improvements in higher education across the world. Other countries are doing more to secure property rights and open their economies, which will enable them to make better use of their human capital. Most obviously, the historic advantage of the U.S. in school attainment has come to an end, as half of the OECD countries now exceed the U.S. in the average number of years of education their citizens receive. Those trends could easily accelerate in the coming decades.

Not Just a Matter of Money

Our evidence of a clear, strong relationship between cognitive skills and economic growth should encourage continued reform efforts. Improvements in mathematics performance called for by No Child Left Behind would matter, contrary to what critics sometimes suggest. Yet reformers should bear in mind that money alone will not yield the necessary improvements. Many expensive attempts around the world to improve schooling have failed to yield actual improvements in student achievement.

Economic growth flows only from reforms that bring actual improvements in cognitive skills. Identifying what works and how to implement it on a society-wide scale remains a challenge, not only for the U.S. but also for many nations across the globe. But, if we are to remain economically competitive, we need to solve the puzzle of our schools and meet the governors' challenge. We should not, simply because we have failed to meet them in the past, decide that the goals were not legitimate or important.

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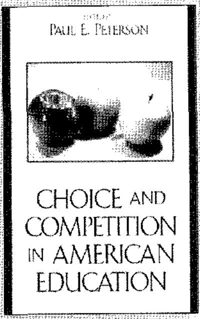
Program on Education Policy & Governance

New Books

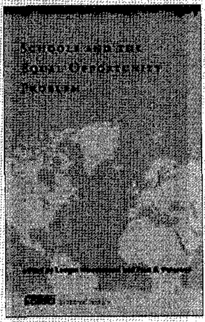
Choice and Competition in American Education
Paul E. Peterson, ed.
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005

In a group of essays originally published in Education Next, *this book examines the likely promise and pitfalls of introducing market concepts to American education. Overall, these essays paint the picture of an education landscape that will be greatly shaped by choice and competition in the 21st century.*



Schools and the Equal Opportunity Problem
Ludger Woessmann and Paul E. Peterson, eds.
MIT Press, 2007

Leading researchers from the United States and Europe report on new findings on the effect of education on equal opportunity, using economic and statistical techniques to assess the results of education policy reform in countries including the United States, Britain, Sweden, Germany, and Italy.



School Choice International
Rajashri Chakrabarti and Paul E. Peterson, eds.
MIT Press, 2008

Public-private partnerships in education policy play an important role in enhancing the supply as well as the quality of human capital. In recent years, there has been a burgeoning of public-private partnerships in different parts of the world. The essays in this volume study public-private partnerships in different parts of the world, such as the Americas, Asia, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

School Choice
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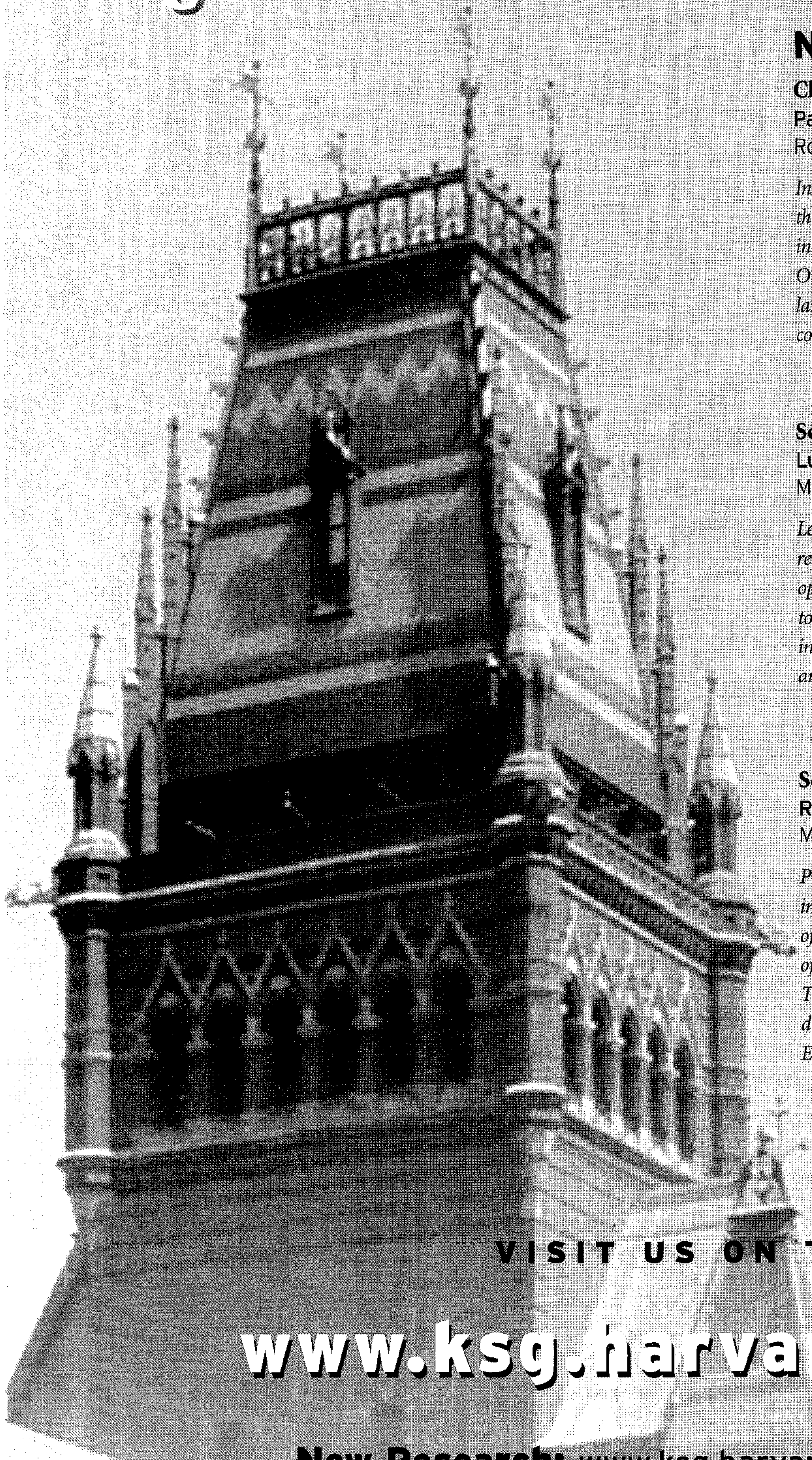

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Charter Politics

By most measures, the charter school reform movement has been remarkably successful. Since the first law authorizing charter schools was passed in Minnesota in 1991, 39 other states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have all adopted legislation supporting public charters. Today, more than 1.2 million U.S. school children attend more than 4,000 public charter schools.

But the success of the charter school movement has been as uneven as it has been widespread (see Figure 1). There are remarkable differences in the number of charter schools and enrollment between states, and even between school districts within the same state. Take Arizona and Minnesota. The two states were early leaders in the charter school movement, both passing legislation highly favorable to the establishment and support of charter schools. Yet, in the 2005–06 school year, more than 10 percent of Arizona's enrollment was in charter schools, while only 3 percent of Minnesota students attended a charter school.

The patchwork pattern of success for the charter school movement in the United States raised two big questions in our minds. What factors led some states to grant charter schools a great deal of latitude and provide solid financial support, while others adopted less permissive legislation? And, why, even among states with similar enabling legislation, do charter schools flourish in some places but not in others?

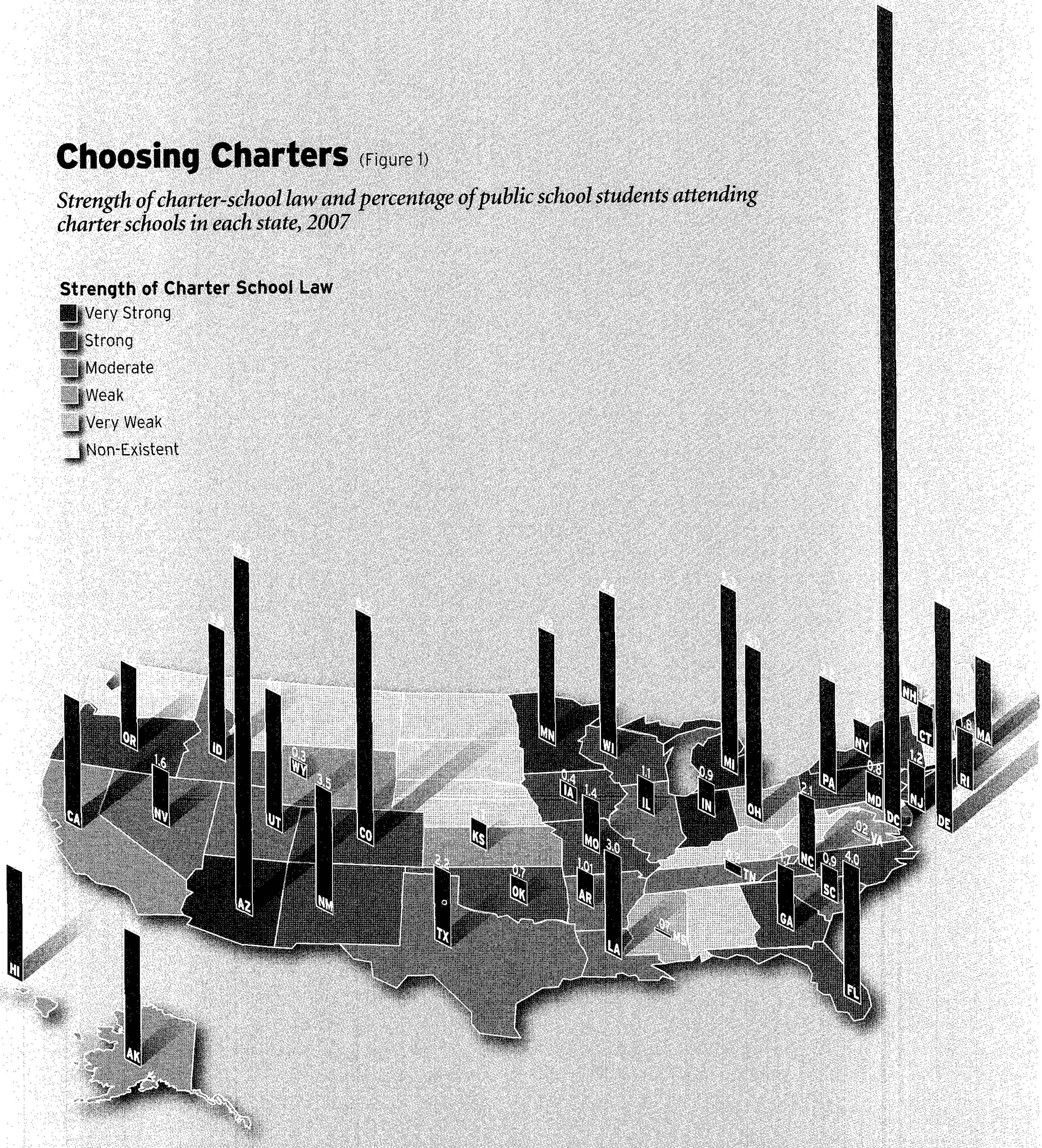
Why some places have more students in charter schools and others have fewer

Several well-regarded researchers have tried to explain the differences in charter school legislation. We decided to build on their work, in an effort to produce a more complete account of the politics of the charter school movement. Like those conducting the previous studies, we considered the role of state demographics and party politics. We also used new data to see whether the academic performance of students in traditional public schools and the influence of teachers unions affect the strength of charter school legislation in a state.

BY CHRISTIANA STODDARD and SEAN P. CORCORAN

Choosing Charters (Figure 1)

Strength of charter-school law and percentage of public school students attending charter schools in each state, 2007


Strength of Charter School Law
Very Strong
Strong
Moderate
Weak
Very Weak
Non-Existent
CA
OR
1.6
NV
ID
0.3
WY
UT
3.5
AZ
NM
CO
KS
2.2
TX
0.7
OK
MN
0.4
IA
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MO
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MD
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VA
DC
NH
CT
1.2
NJ
DE
1.8
RI
MA
HI
AK

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Note: The Center for Education Reform ranks each state on a scale of 0 to 5 using a number of criteria, based on how the state's charter laws support or restrict the development of a significant number of autonomous charter schools. For more information, see www.edreform.com.

SOURCE: The Center for Education Reform, Ranking Scorecard, 2007.

But this was only one part of our larger project. Marshalling demographic, financial, political, and school performance data from 1990 to 2004, we took the novel step of assessing patterns in the presence of charter schools and in their enrollments at both the state and local levels.

Our Approach

The first thing we needed to do was identify U.S. charter schools and their locations and determine their enrollments. The most recent comprehensive catalog of charter schools and school enrollments is the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data. We combined the NCES file with the Center for Education Reform (CER) directory of charter schools to create a master database of 3,066 schools for the 2003–04 school year. Next, we calculated the total number of charter schools and the total enrollment in charters and traditional public schools in each school district. In all, at least 1,000 of the 14,000 districts in the U.S. contained at least one charter school.

With this information in hand, we set out to answer three questions about the charter school movement at the state level. One, why did some states pass charter laws earlier than others? To answer this question, we first studied how D.C. and the 37 states that passed charter laws before 1999 differed from the remaining states that had not adopted charter laws by 1999. For the 40 states that passed a charter law by the 2003–04 school year, we also investigated how earlier and later adopters, grouped by year of the law's enactment, differ from one another. We wanted to know, for instance, how Minnesota, the state that passed the nation's first charter school law in 1991, is different from Maryland, which passed the most recent enabling legislation in 2003.

Two, we wondered why some states enacted laws highly favorable to charter schools while others passed more-restrictive statutes. In this part of our study, we compared states based on the rating of their laws by CER, which is an advocacy organization for charter schools. CER rates the "strength," or permissiveness, of the laws' provisions. CER judges each law against 10 criteria, each scored on a 1–5 scale, with a total possible score of 50 for laws most favorable to charter schools. These criteria include whether the state grants charter schools an exemption from collective bargaining, the number of chartering authorities beyond local school boards, the number of new charter schools permitted, and whether charters are granted waivers from certain state and local laws. Arizona, Michigan, and Minnesota have enacted relatively "strong" legislation, that is, legislation that provides considerable latitude to charter schools. Other states, such as Kansas, Tennessee, and Virginia, have adopted charter legislation with much more restrictive provisions. In our study, we assigned states without charter school laws a CER law strength score of 0. Although an advocacy organization may have an incentive to understate the strength of these laws, it is unlikely that any overall downward bias would create problems for our assessment of states relative to one another (and, in fact, these scores have been used in a number of other scholarly studies).

Finally, we asked why some states have a greater percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools than other states. In all our analyses of state laws and statewide enrollment, we wanted to know how characteristics of the state affect the level of support for charters. We were primarily interested in assessing the role of demographics, student achievement, and the extent of school choice currently available in shaping how states participate in the charter school movement. Because the presence of charter schools in an area might affect both student achievement and the decisions of families to move to a district, we measured state demographics and student achievement during the 1989–90 school year, several years before the first charter laws took effect. When studying the pattern of charter school enrollment across the country, we took into account how each of three factors contributes to or retards charter school growth: per pupil expenditures (also measured during the 1989–90 school year), length of time a charter law was on the books, and degree of permissiveness of each state's charter school law, as measured by the CER index.

Demographics and Politics

Before we proceed, let's consider why we would expect demographics to shape charter school politics and participation. It is possible that different racial, ethnic, and economic groups demand different curricular approaches: for example, bilingual education, arts, vocational instruction, or programs for gifted or at-risk students. In areas with greater racial and ethnic diversity and economic inequality, families and policymakers may support charter schools as a means of satisfying diverse educational preferences. Indeed, many charter school founders explicitly state that satisfying the educational needs of a target student group is central to their mission. Or it may be that demographics matter because changes in the demographic composition of local school districts increase the desire among families to sort students into similar peer groups. Other researchers have found that white students in charter schools transferred from schools that, on average, had a higher proportion of nonwhite students than their new charter school. In any case, we expected states and communities with more heterogeneous populations to be more supportive of the charter school movement.

A word about our measure of student achievement. It was not clear to us whether parents are most concerned with the absolute level of student performance or with performance relative to what they expect given resources in the school, household, and community. For example, expectations about high-school dropout rates could vary with K–12 expenditures and local poverty. Whether parents, and policymakers, are ultimately "satisfied" with public education may hinge on how well schools are performing relative to local expectations. We conducted our analysis alternately using absolute student achievement, measured with statewide mean SAT scores for the 1989–90 school year and the mean high-school dropout rate calculated from 1990 census data, and with a second measure that represents the deviation of actual achievement from expected student performance.

The two achievement measures, SAT scores and dropout rates, have the benefit of reflecting student achievement at both ends of the ability distribution. A disadvantage, however, is that SAT scores and dropout rates are much more closely aligned to secondary-school performance than to elementary-school performance. And only about 25 percent of charter school students were enrolled in a secondary grade during the 2003–04 school year. We did, however, have a reasonable amount of confidence in the use of these achievement measures because mean SAT scores and high-school graduation rates are very public indicators of educational outcomes, and parents and policymakers are likely to consider these measures when they take positions on charter schools.

> **Finally, we asked why some states have a greater percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools than other states. In all our analyses of state laws and statewide enrollment, we wanted to know how characteristics of the state affect the level of support for charters.**

To estimate expected student performance, we used a statistical procedure that predicts student achievement (i.e., SAT scores and dropout rates) in the state based on school characteristics and household demographics. The school characteristics we used include per pupil expenditure in the state. Our household demographic measures included the share of blacks and Hispanics in the state population, the fraction of adults who are college educated, and median household income. For instance, if a state has a higher dropout rate than one would predict given its characteristics, we considered that state's school system to be underperforming. Compared with parents and policymakers in states where expectations are being met or exceeded, those in states with underperforming schools may be more supportive of education reforms such as charter schools.

Of course, whether educational preferences based on demographics or dissatisfaction with existing school performance manifest themselves in support for charter schools depends on other circumstances as well: notably, the political power of opponents to charter schools, the most prominent opponents being teachers unions; and the degree of school choice already available to parents. We estimated the power of unions with the fraction of all teachers in a state who are union members. We based our assessment of the degree of school choice in a state on several indicators, including the fraction of students in the state enrolled in private schools and an index that measures the extent of choice parents have between school districts in the state as of the 1989–90 school year. The landscape of school choice options may be important in that demand for public charters could be greater where parents have fewer schooling options.

The demographic and political characteristics of a state and character of the state law authorizing charter schools undoubtedly matter in some way for the fate of charter schools in a state, but most decisions about charter school formation and attendance are made within school districts—by founders who decide to start a new school, by authorizers who empower them to do so, and, ultimately, by parents who decide to enroll their students. Therefore, we also gave our attention to two indicators of the spread of charter schooling. We measured expansion of charters across districts: first, by whether the district had at least one operating charter school in the 2003–04 school year and, second, by the fraction of public school students enrolled in charter schools during the 2003–04 school year.

We compared districts with at least one charter to districts with no charters and compared districts with higher and lower enrollments in charter schools to search for differences among districts that could explain the variation. As with our analysis of differences among states, we estimated the roles played by demographics, student achievement, and degree of school choice currently available in explaining variation in support for charter schools. We also accounted for whether the district is urban, suburban, or rural; whether the district is elementary, secondary, or unified; per pupil expenditure in the district during the 1989–90 school year; and differences attributable to the state. State-level differences included the strength of charter laws, statewide demographics, existing school choice policies, number of school districts, and the presence of charter support or opposition groups that operate throughout the state.

Explaining Support from State to State

State demographics, student academic performance (measured relative to expectations), and teachers union strength all play important roles in shaping state charter legislation and student participation. Let's begin with demographics. States with larger Hispanic populations tended to pass laws supporting charter schools earlier and were likely to pass more-permissive legislation. For example, states with an Hispanic-population of 14 percentage points (two standard deviations) higher than the average were about 10 percent more likely to pass a charter law. These states also passed laws that ranked 12 to 14 points higher on the CER strength index (out of a total of 50). There is not, however, strong evidence that these states also had a greater proportion of their students enrolled in charter schools in 2003–04.

Considering the effects of Hispanic population on charter laws, we were surprised that the fraction of a state's population that is black did not affect the likelihood that a state would pass a charter law, nor did we find any relationship to the timing of passage or the strength of the law. We were very interested to discover that the size of a state's black population does, however, have a strong relationship with a state's charter enrollment. For example, a 12.1-percentage-point increase (one standard deviation) in the fraction of a state's population that is black is associated with roughly a 2-percentage-point increase in charter school enrollment in the state. This is effectively double the charter school enrollment in the average state. One potential explanation for this finding is that black voters, being heavily concentrated in the Democratic Party, are not traditionally swing voters who could influence state legislators' positions on charter legislation. But once charters are established, African American families are active supporters of charter schools.

Once charters are established, African American families are active supporters of charter schools. States with more-educated populations and those with higher-than-predicted dropout rates had higher charter school enrollment.

Strong charter laws appeared earlier in states where the fraction of adults with at least a college education was higher. For example, states in which the college-educated share of the population was 2.4 percentage points higher passed laws on average six months earlier. States with more-educated populations also had a greater fraction of students enrolled in charter schools. The size of this estimated effect is similar to the effect of a larger black population, about 2 percent greater enrollment in charter schools accompanying a one-standard-deviation increase in the fraction of college-educated adults in the state. Our data did not allow us to explain what lies behind this relationship, but we do have two conjectures. Highly educated citizens may have a greater willingness to experiment with education reforms, or there may be a "supply side" phenomenon: more educated adults translates into a larger pool of charter suppliers.

When we looked at changes in state demographics over time, we found that states with growing Hispanic and college-educated populations were more likely to pass early charter laws. We also found that states with growing income inequality during the 1980s were more likely to pass laws and to pass stronger charter laws during the 1990s.

States with higher-than-expected SAT scores were less likely to pass charter school legislation; tended to adopt such legislation later, if at all; and passed weaker laws. There is no evidence, however, of a statistically significant relationship between state SAT performance and enrollment in charter schools.

A higher- or lower-than-expected high-school dropout rate has no clear relationship to the passage or strength of charter legislation, but does, interestingly, have a strong relationship with charter school participation. States with higher-than-predicted dropout rates had significantly higher enrollment in charters. If the dropout rate is an additional 2 percentage points, or roughly one standard deviation, higher than expected, a state experiences a 1-percentage-point increase in charter school enrollment.

What could account for the differences in the estimated effects of SAT performance and the high-school dropout rates? It may be that SAT scores, as a very public measure of school performance, lead to agitation for charter laws, but that charters themselves are more likely to target students at risk of dropping out, and therefore participation is more closely associated with dropout rates.

Finally, membership in teachers unions has a substantial impact on the legal status of charter schools. States where a greater fraction of teachers were covered by a union contract in 1987 were much less likely to pass a charter law in the 1990s, more likely to pass a law later (if at all), and more likely to pass a weaker law. A one-standard-deviation increase in the fraction of teachers who are unionized, that is, an additional 20 percent of instructional employees covered by union contracts, means a state is 20 percent less likely to pass a charter law. We were initially puzzled to find that, conditional on the successful passage of a charter law and controlling for law strength, the fraction of students enrolled in charter schools appears to increase with the fraction of teachers in the state who are unionized. We share some further thoughts on these contradictory findings in our analysis of school districts.

We found little evidence that the extent of choice among districts in a state is related to either charter school legislation or participation, nor did we find a relationship between income or income inequality and legislative support for charter schools. We did find a positive relationship between the fraction of students enrolled in private schools prior to the passage of charter laws and law passage and strength. This may be due to private school parents supporting public charter schools as a substitute for private schools, or it may be related to broad dissatisfaction with public schools and a generally higher demand for alternatives.

Some have argued that the political composition of the governor's office and the state legislature may influence the success of charter school laws. We reconducted all our statistical analysis, taking into account party control of the governor's office and state legislature from 1990 to 2004. We never found party control of the state government to have an effect on the probability that a law passed, the year a law passed, the strength of the law, or participation in charter schools once we controlled for other state characteristics. In fact, of the 40 states passing a law, 24 passed it when a Republican was governor and 16 when a Democrat was governor, and about two-thirds of the states passing a charter law did so when there was no single party controlling both the legislature and the governor's office.

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School District Support for Charter Schools

We began to review the findings of our district analysis by first checking that the results from our statistical procedures were consistent with well-known patterns of enrollment in charter schools. As we expected, school districts with only secondary schools or both secondary and elementary schools were more likely to have a charter school in 2003–04 than districts with only elementary schools. School districts primarily based in a large or mid-sized city or large town were more likely to have a charter school than suburban or rural school districts.

We found that the fraction of a school district's population that is Hispanic has no clear relationship with either the presence of charter schools or enrollment in the district. As in our state analysis, an increase in the fraction of a school district's population that is black makes a district more likely to have a charter school in operation and to have a greater share of its students enrolled in charter schools. We estimated that an increase of 11 percentage points in the black population in a district increases the share of students enrolled in charter schools by about 6 percentage points. Considering that the average share of students enrolled in charter schools in school districts with a charter school is only about 10 percent, this is a substantial effect.

We also examined changes in demographic characteristics between 1980 and 1990, and found that districts with a rising fraction of black or college-educated individuals saw greater participation in charter schools. In addition, we found that districts where income inequality was rising saw higher participation in charter schools. This finding may reflect a divergence in preferences for education programs, for example, or an increasing diversity of needs within school districts that raise the demand for charter school options.

School districts that already had higher fractions of students enrolled in private schools, even accounting for the urban or rural location of the district, had a greater likelihood of having a charter school open in their district by 2003–04 and a greater share of their students enrolled in charters. Whether this pattern is indicative of general receptiveness on the part of these districts toward alternatives to public schools or a long-standing dissatisfaction with traditional public schools, it certainly suggests that private schools do not serve as a hindrance to the start-up of public charter schools. Our measure of the current level of choice in the public school system has no statistically significant relationship with charter support within school districts.

Districts with higher-than-predicted high-school dropout rates were, like states with high dropout rates, more likely to have charter schools and a greater share of students enrolled in charters. An 8-percentage-point increase in the adjusted dropout rate (that is, the average deviation from the predicted dropout rate) was associated with about a 2-percentage-point increase in the fraction of students enrolled in charters.

We were very interested to see the relationship between the strength of teachers unions and charter school enrollment, which we first glimpsed in our state analysis, reemerge in our study of districts. Contrary to what one might expect given the opposition—or at least hearty skepticism—of teachers unions to the charter school movement, districts with a greater union presence were more likely to have a charter school and to have a greater share of public school students enrolled in charter schools in 2003–04. A 39-percentage-point increase in the fraction of teachers unionized is associated with about a 2-percentage-point increase in the fraction of students enrolled in charters.

What lies behind this relationship between teachers' unionization and support for charter schools? We cannot say for sure with our data, but it may be that parents are more likely to support charter schools in heavily unionized states, perhaps in a desire for more local control and less bureaucracy, or a desire for curricular and personnel policies that are less influenced by the union. Strong unions are more successful than weaker ones in opposing liberal charter legislation, but once a charter law is adopted, it seems that parents see charters as an avenue for reform in districts where unions have a strong hold on traditional public schools.

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Conclusions

Understanding why states pass laws favorable to charters and why charter school participation is higher in some areas than others is important if we want to identify locations where school choice reforms are likely to present meaningful alternatives to traditional public schools and where they are likely to remain reforms on the margins. Our findings suggest that there are several forces propelling the expansion of the charter school movement. One of the most powerful is growing diversity in state and district populations. States and school districts with more blacks and college-educated adults have a substantially larger share of their students in charter schools than other districts. Failure to meet expectations for student academic performance, as measured by SAT scores and high-school dropout rates, also fuels the passage of charter laws, leads to the passage of stronger charter laws, contributes to the creation of charter schools, and boosts charter school enrollment. Unexpectedly, we discovered that a leading opponent of the charter school movement, teachers unions, appears to contribute indirectly to the expansion of charter schools. In states where teachers are unionized at the highest rates, charter laws were less likely to be enacted, were passed later, and were less favorable to charter schools in states that did adopt charter laws. But in states and school districts with strong unions and charter laws of similar strength, more families have sought out alternatives for their children in charter schools. All else being equal, a highly unionized teaching labor force goes hand in hand with the creation of more charter schools and more students learning in charter school classrooms.

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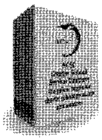

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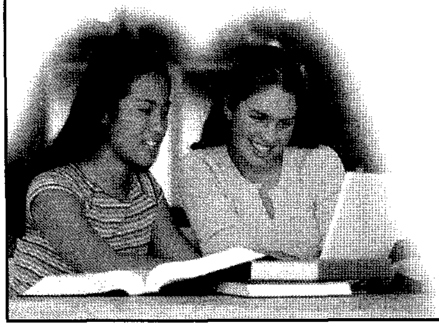

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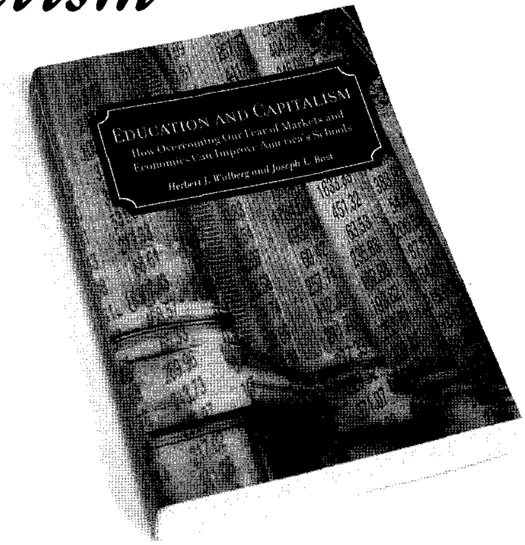
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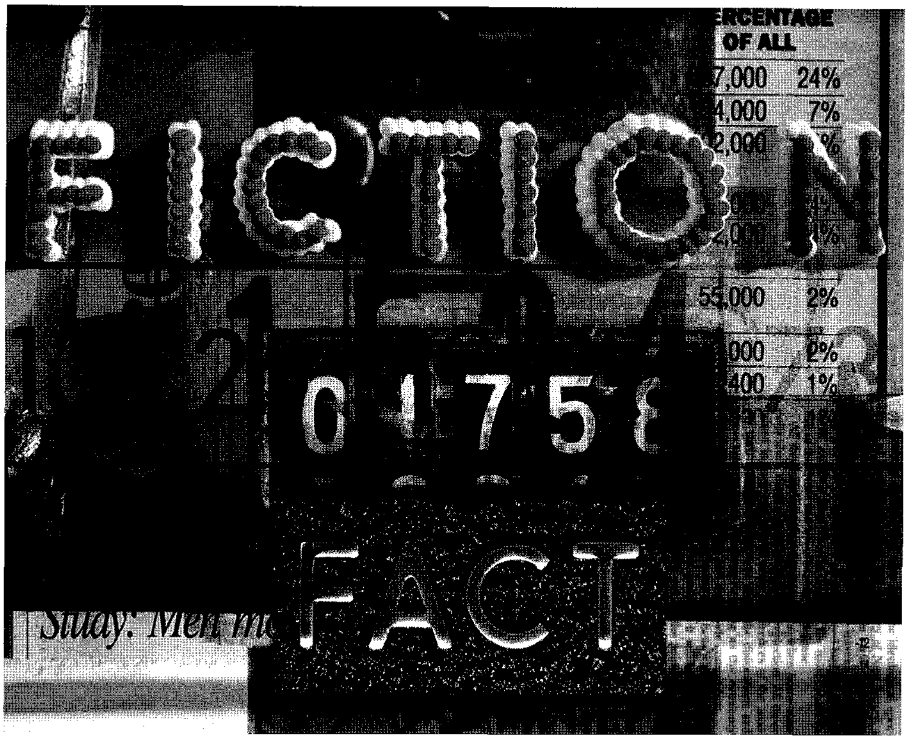

ILLUSTRATION / JOHN WEBER

Checked:
David Dodenhoff, "Fixing the Milwaukee Public Schools: The Limits of Parent-Driven Reform." Wisconsin Policy Research Institute Report, *Vol. 20, No. 8 (October 2007).*

Checked by Martin West

Heads understandably turned last October when the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* announced the release of a new study concluding that "school choice isn't a powerful tool for driving educational improvement in Milwaukee Public Schools." Since the early 1990s, Milwaukee has been home to an increasingly varied array of school choice programs that now includes the nation's oldest voucher program, numerous charter schools, and extensive inter- and intra-district public-school choice systems. Had credible evidence emerged that these programs were for naught?

Equally startling was the study's source: the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, a conservative think tank funded in large part by the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, one of the nation's leading backers of school choice.

"The report you are reading did not yield the results we had hoped to find," wrote George Lightbourn, a senior fellow at the institute and former secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Administration, in a foreword accompanying the study. Lightbourn lamented the study's central finding that, despite the impressive array of school choice options available to Milwaukee parents, "only 10 percent have been the active consumers that would exert market-based influence to [sic] the school system." He fretted, too, about low levels of parental involvement in the district, especially among parents of older children. "For children ages fourteen to seventeen," he wrote, "only 11 percent of MPS [Milwaukee Public Schools] parents are actively involved both in the school setting and at home."

Lightbourn may well have spared himself this agonizing. The study contains no direct information whatsoever about the actual behavior of Milwaukee parents—and certainly nothing that would justify the very specific claims stated above. Its author, "David Dodenhoff, Ph.D.," makes no claim to have interviewed a single Milwaukee parent, nor to have surveyed any of them by mail or on the Internet.

Instead, Dodenhoff bases his study on information gathered from a *national* sample of parents, not from anyone in Milwaukee. His approach assumes that, when it comes to school choice, the behavior of Milwaukee parents is identical to that of parents of similar demographic background nationwide, despite the fact that Milwaukee's school choice environment is unique.

The method is akin to estimating the share of Hawaiians who surf by counting the number of surfers nationwide, no matter their proximity to a beach, the height of the waves, or the warmth of the water.

A flawed approach

Milwaukee has the most extensive system of school choice in any American city. As of 2005, more than one-third of the city's parents chose either to enroll their child in a charter school, use a voucher to go to a private school, or seek out a place in a suburban public school. All other students in Milwaukee may choose among the city's traditional public schools, a policy put in place years ago to foster school integration. Each winter, the school district asks parents to list up to three schools they want their child to attend the following fall. The vast majority of those who complete an application receive their first choice.

Dodenhoff set out in his study to assess the potential for public school choice to improve student achievement in Milwaukee Public Schools. Despite the fact that such information is readily available, he did not find out how many public school parents are sending their children to suburban schools, or selecting a charter school, or filling out the form listing their three school choices within the traditional public sector.

Instead, Dodenhoff looked at what parents around the United States are doing, as reported in the National Household Education Survey conducted in 2003 by the U.S. Department of Education. That survey asked parents to report on whether they chose their child's school, whether they chose from among more than two schools, and whether they took academic considerations into account when doing so. He uses this information to estimate the relationship between four parental characteristics (ethnic background, educational attainment, whether both parents are in the home, and mother's employment status) and whether the parent is choosing the child's school.

Dodenhoff claims that these characteristics are highly correlated with the likelihood that a parent will be choosing a school, but he presents no direct evidence on this point. He simply notes that *another* U.S. Department of Education study based on a *different* dataset showed that the variables he uses were "particularly influential determinants of parental involvement." He does not report on their usefulness for predicting the likelihood of exercising school choice, in his dataset or any other.

Dodenhoff then employs census data to estimate the distribution of Milwaukee parents on each of the four characteristics and uses their alleged relationship with choice activity nationwide to estimate how much choosing is going on in Milwaukee. The validity of his results thus depends on the four characteristics perfectly predicting a U.S. parent's likelihood of choosing a school and the assumption that Milwaukee parents do exactly what parents are doing everywhere else.

The method is akin to estimating the share of Hawaiians who surf by counting the number of surfers nationwide, no matter their proximity to a beach, the height of the waves, or the warmth of the water.

Nonetheless, Dodenhoff straightforwardly reports that "just under 35 percent of MPS parents actively choose a school for their child, rather than simply opting for the default neighborhood school." Worse, he reports less than 10 percent do so from among multiple schools based on academic considerations. He ultimately concludes that promoting school choice "may be a distraction from the hard work of fixing the district's schools." Of course, Dodenhoff's failure to examine any data from the Milwaukee school district renders this conclusion entirely unsupported.

What if his estimate is correct?

But what if Dodenhoff were correct that only 35 percent of Milwaukee parents choose, and only 10 percent choose from among more than two schools, using academic criteria for their judgment? Would that prove that efforts to promote school choice are misguided?

Consider this thought experiment: What if only 10 percent of Americans purchased cars based on comparisons they made regarding the quality of the engineering? Would the quality of cars decline, or would the well-informed consumers set the trends that others follow?

Most analysts agree that even when only a few consumers are making smart choices, those few still drive competition in the marketplace, in part because information spreads outward from the better informed to others. As education scholars Mark Schneider and Paul Teske have explained, "Competitive markets do not need all consumers to be informed—competitive pressures can result even if a relatively small subset of consumers engage in informed, self-interested search." At least in theory, a few quality-conscious consumers can drive systemwide improvement and lead to a better matching of parents and schools, even in the absence of extensive choice activity.

Dodenhoff clearly believes that far more than 10 percent of parents need to base their school decisions on academic considerations if school choice is going to enhance school quality. In this regard, he could be right. But to know whether or not 10 percent of Milwaukee's parents are making informed judgments, he needs to talk to a few hundred of them, randomly chosen. So far he has talked to none. That will not do.

Martin West is an assistant professor of education, political science, and public policy at Brown University and an executive editor of Education Next.

book review

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By Richard D. Kahlenberg

Columbia University Press, 2007, $29.95; 552 pages.

As reviewed by Nathan Glazer

"Madman or Visionary?" reads the publicity material that accompanies this biography of Albert Shanker. The dust jacket describes the paradigmatic moment in Woody Allen's 1973 movie, Sleeper, in which a future Rip Van Winkle awakens to learn that civilization was destroyed when "a man by the name of Albert Shanker got hold of a nuclear warhead." Five years earlier, Shanker, leader of the New York City teachers union, shook the city with a series of strikes to defend the rights of teachers who had been dismissed from Brooklyn schools. The schools were part of an experiment in "community control," an approach to school reform then favored by liberals and black activists. The community in this case was black, and those governing the schools under the experimental program demanded black teachers and black principals. There were few in the New York City public schools at the time. Many teachers and principals were Jews, and members of that religious group, as schoolteachers, social workers, shopkeepers, and small landlords, were seen by black militants as the exploiters of African Americans. These Jewish occupational specialties were hardly at the heights of the economy, or the power structure, but from the perspective of the black ghetto, they were the power structure. Among whites with whom poor blacks came into contact, the book notes one observer saying, only the policeman was not Jewish. Community control over city schools pitted blacks against Jews. When, during one of these disruptive strikes, an anti-Semitic leaflet appeared, Shanker did not hesitate to reproduce it in the hundreds of thousands to paint his black opponents as Jew-haters. He was denounced for exacerbating group tensions in a difficult time.

In the early 1960s, Shanker had played a leading role in organizing 50,000 of New York City's public school teachers. He was one of a group of tough union leaders who in defiance of state law led strikes by public employees, disrupted the lives of millions, and went to jail as a result. Mike Quill, the leader of the transit workers union, shut down the subways, to the outrage of millions of commuters, and went to jail as a result. Who remembers Quill? But everyone remembers Al Shanker, who once said in response to a question about the rights of schoolchildren, "they don't pay the dues in this union."

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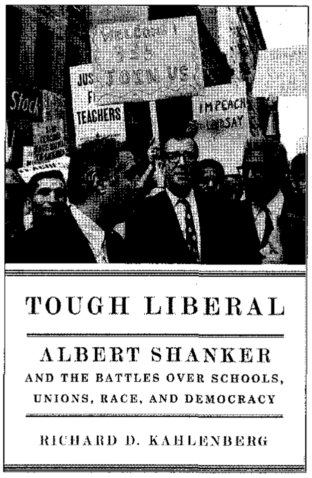

TOUGH LIBERAL

ALBERT SHANKER

AND THE BATTLES OVER SCHOOLS, UNIONS, RACE, AND DEMOCRACY

RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG

Despite the similarities and the similar headaches they gave Mayor John Lindsay, Shanker was very different from Mike Quill. He was drawn from a radically different milieu, the Jewish working class, and those origins foreshadowed his transformation. Alongside his defense of teachers' rights, there was always a larger vision, which made it possible for him to escape from the execration that liberals heaped on him in the 1960s.

Shanker graduated from fierce union leader to education statesman and leader in the world of education reform. Indeed, he does warrant a biography; no trade-union leader of the last 40 years, in the age after John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman, Walter Reuther, David Dubinsky, and other shapers of American unionism, is so worthy of one.

Shanker came from a world that no longer exists, one in which bright young people with political interests were divided between Socialists and Communists. The conflicts between the two—in school arguments, in college organizations, in trade unions, in local politics—shaped a generation that was defined by two dominant traits, an unbending anti-Communism and a defense of unions and worker's rights. One can only understand Shanker, and the paradoxes he presents to contemporary liberalism, from the point of view of those origins.

Shanker attended New York's Stuyvesant High School, an examination school for the gifted, where he excelled in debate, and the University of Illinois, where he joined the Young People's Socialist League and showed his organizational talents by drawing unexpectedly large audiences for Norman Thomas, the perennial Socialist candidate for president. His heroes were John Dewey and Sidney Hook, and he went on to study for a Ph.D. in philosophy at Columbia. But he ran out of "money and patience," and at the age of 24 took a job as a teacher in a "tough East Harlem elementary school." At the time, 1952, we are told, there were 106 teachers' organizations in the New York City school system. The Teachers Guild, which Shanker joined, was part of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). John Dewey held card #1 in the New York City local. The Communists were at the time powerful in New York City's white-collar unions of teachers, social workers, and the like. The Teachers Guild and the AFT were fiercely anti-Communist, demanded collective bargaining (then controversial for teachers), and held a larger progressive social vision than most unions. For example, the AFT refused to charter segregated locals and filed an amicus brief in support of desegregation in *Brown v. Board of Education.*

Shanker rose rapidly in the union ranks, becoming president in 1964. Liberals (and Socialists, as Shanker was) were then united around the issues of civil rights, workers' rights, and anti-Communism. In the wake of the community control struggle, this unity dissolved. Affirmative action split the liberals: Shanker was for affirmative action, but always against quotas. At the time, he even had important black allies, such as civil rights activist Bayard Rustin. Complicating the anti-Communist cause was the war in Vietnam. Shanker supported the war; to him it was a means to prevent the expansion of Communist totalitarianism, but to many other liberals and Socialists it was a doubtful effort at American hegemonism. Even workers' rights divided liberals: with the rise of identity politics, and the shift of blue-collar voters to Nixon in protest of liberals' anti-Vietnam war and pro–affirmative action stance, trade union issues lost their pristine value to many liberals. Shanker thought of himself as a liberal, indeed a Socialist; but for many liberals he seemed a racist conservative, as he maintained his fierce anti-Communist stance, supported American military power in defense of democracy, and insisted on the primacy of the trade-union movement in making a better society.

One detects in this complex of attitudes the seeds of present-day "neoconservatism," which evolved among Socialist anti-Communists, and in time became the intellectual footing for a militant American foreign policy. Shanker was deeply committed to this orientation and defended strongly the AFL-CIO's international work in support of free trade unions and against Communism. But that was only one of the roles he played. More significantly, he began to look at the problems of education from a larger perspective than that of organized teachers' rights. He was an early proponent of charter schools, but turned against them as he saw some launched by black militants or religious conservatives. He wanted to implement a professional model for school teachers and supported peer review and tests for veteran teachers, which were not popular with the rank and file. Influenced by E. D. Hirsch, he supported a national curriculum and serious and high-stakes national tests and was a major figure in the painful evolution of this effort. In these enterprises, he became close to leading businessmen, governors, and presidents. For more than two decades as the leader of the smaller but more energetic and enlightened of the two major national teacher organizations, he became perhaps the single most important figure in the difficult effort to improve American schools.

Shanker thought of himself as a liberal, indeed a Socialist; but for many liberals he seemed a racist conservative.

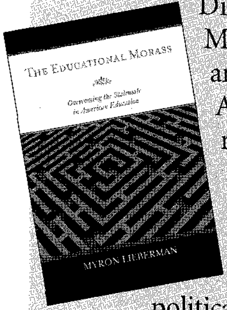
Richard Kahlenberg is well known for his advocacy of affirmative action on the basis of economic criteria rather than racial identity, which was also Shanker's strong preference. Kahlenberg has written a richly detailed and well-researched account of Shanker's development, the positions he adopted, the influential roles he played. He finds little to criticize in Shanker's career, and it was indeed for the most part an admirable one. It has no equal in American teacher unionism, or in the world of organized labor generally, and his story is an important contribution to the history of American education reform.

Nathan Glazer is professor emeritus of education and sociology at Harvard University.

BOOK ALERT

The Educational Morass: Overcoming the Stalemate in American Education. Myron Lieberman (Rowman and Littlefield).

The equal-opportunity, granddaddy longlegs of all curmudgeons, Myron Lieberman, manages in one volume to savage teachers unions, education schools, the Education Writers Association, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, education research, egalitarian school-choice proponents, and conservatives Diane Ravitch, Terry Moe, Frederick Hess, and Chester E. Finn Jr. A style thought to be reserved for left-wing agitators and trade-union swat teams surfaces from the opposite end of the political spectrum.



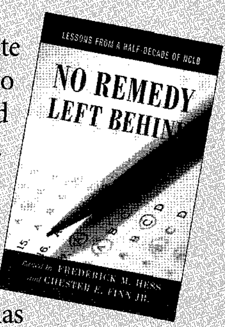
Lieberman's fact-filled, right-handed punches land solidly, entertainingly, time and again, but so pugilistic is the attack dog he forgets his alleged purpose: overcoming the education stalemate. For him, nothing works—neither merit pay, nor test-score accountability, nor alternative certification, nor class-size reduction, nor education schools, nor choices for low-income families. All fall short of the glory of the free-market ideal.

A few positive suggestions nonetheless intrude. Told not to pay good teachers more, we are instead asked to give extra cash to those teaching math and science. Told to be more critical of charter schools, we are asked, in a brief passage, to let them continue.

Lieberman is such a well-read, critical thinker it is a shame he cannot turn off the invective spigot long enough to construct the viable political and policy strategy none other has been able to devise. Unfortunately, Lieberman, in style, cannot escape his own trade-union past, however distant.

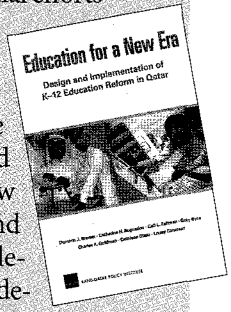
No Remedy Left Behind: Lessons from a Half-Decade of NCLB. Frederick M. Hess and Chester E. Finn Jr., editors (AEI Press).

Few would dispute the claim that No Child Left Behind needs an overhaul. Yet with the deadline for the law's on-time reauthorization now past, a consensus about its future has yet to emerge. The bulk of this important book consists of 12 detailed studies of how the law's mandated remedies for schools identified for improvement are playing out in states and districts across the country. The findings, if unsurprising, are nonetheless sobering: the extent of public school choice has been negligible; participation in supplemental educational services, while rising, remains low; and the law's restructuring requirements for schools and districts are being deployed in their mildest forms. Confronted with unrealistic goals and an array of legislated loopholes, most local officials have chosen simply to run out the clock. Hess and Finn, in hard-hitting chapters that bookend the volume, call on Congress to set realistic expectations for student performance based on national standards, to provide districts with initial flexibility when intervening in failing schools, but to establish tough consequences for superintendents and principals if those efforts are unsuccessful. Policymakers looking for easy advice heading into 2008 should turn elsewhere. But those seeking to convert NCLB from a utopian mandate into a coherent, workable system for school improvement will find welcome counsel in these pages.

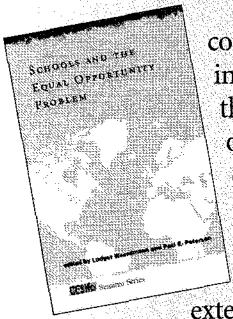

LESSONS FROM A HALF DECADE OF NCLB
NO REMEDY
LEFT BEHIN
Edited by FREDERICK M. HESS and CHESTER E. FINN JR.

Education for a New Era: Design and Implementation of K–12 Education Reform in Qatar. Dominic J. Brewer et al. (Rand-Qatar Policy Institute).

Any volume endorsed by Dr. Sheikha Abdulla Al-Misnad, president of the University of Qatar, and *Education Next* editorial board member Paul Hill calls for a closer look. Here, the RAND team that has been working with the oil-rich Gulf nation Qatar on a radical redesign of the emirate's education system offers a straightforward account of their handiwork. Detailing Phase I of the RAND-Qatar effort, which spanned 2001–04, the authors explain the creation and implementation of curriculum standards, national testing, independent government-funded schools, annual report cards, and parental choice. They don't present evidence regarding effects of these initial efforts on student achievement but do explain how RAND diagnosed the weaknesses in the Qatari system, devised the Education for a New Era reform model, and the challenges of implementing standards, independent schools, and the Qatar Student Assessment System. Written in a prose style by turns reminiscent of a government white paper (e.g., "while achieving the goal of free, standardized education is commendable") and a social studies textbook (e.g., "in 1907, Qatar's resources consisted of 1,430 camels, 240 horses, and 817 pearl boats"), this slender book is nonetheless packed with interesting information.

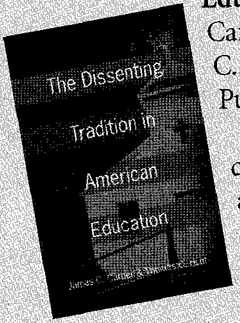


Schools and the Equal Opportunity Problem. Ludger Woessmann and Paul E. Peterson, editors (MIT Press).



Can schools overcome the highly variable influences of family so that the opportunities of all students are equalized? Since 1966, when the Coleman Report first shined its bright light on the extent of the achievement gap and revealed how little schools were doing to ameliorate it, school reformers have sought ways to raise the educational achievement of disadvantaged students and researchers have analyzed these efforts. The 11 papers in this conference volume were contributed by American and European researchers who marshaled the tools of economic analysis to assess recent efforts to close the achievement gap in the U.S. and abroad. These reforms fall under three headings: changing the peer group, refocusing resources, and implementing standards and choice. The Coleman Report identified the peer group at school as an important factor affecting learning, but several papers in this volume suggest that the socioeconomic status or academic ability of peers has little effect on academic performance. Other papers cast doubt on the premise that focusing additional material resources on disadvantaged students will raise their academic outcomes; in one paper, Julian Betts and John Roemer estimate that schools would need to spend 8 to 10 times as much money on the education of blacks as whites to achieve equity across racial groups. On the other hand, exit exams and higher graduation requirements may raise academic achievement, and properly designed choice programs may also help disadvantaged students. The chapters in this book raise as many questions as they answer, leaving the door open for many future conferences and books on this topic.

The Dissenting Tradition in American Education. James C. Carper and Thomas C. Hunt (Peter Lang Publishing).

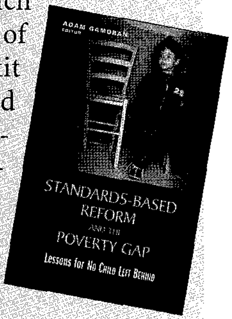


American education has a long and well-documented history of dissenters. During the past 25 years, education historians James C. Carper and Thomas C. Hunt separately have published many essays on 19th-century Catholic and Protestant public school opponents; they have also analyzed recent home-schooling initiatives and written about private Christian day schools. This new book brings together material from eight previously published articles as well as a chapter on the bishop of New York City, John Hughes (1797–1864). The essays cover 19th-century Catholic and Protestant opposition to public schools, including Bishop Hughes's efforts to obtain public monies for Catholic schools and those of church leaders to encourage their parishioners to create alternative parochial schools rather than send their children to secular public schools.

The "final thoughts" chapter provides some of the most intriguing and intellectually challenging contributions of the book. As they ponder the future of dissent in American education, the authors note that "in some respects the current educational landscape, with its diversity of options, is starting to resemble the landscape of pre-common-school America." They also consider whether "the time [today] is indeed ripe for Americans to consider, in the words of authors Rockne McCarthy, James Skillen, and William Harper, 'Disestablishment a Second Time.'"

Standards-Based Reform and the Poverty Gap: Lessons for No Child Left Behind. Adam Gamoran, editor (Brookings Institution Press).

This conference volume has an identity crisis. Its marketers clearly want to ride the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) wave, but at least half of the book (the more interesting half!) is only marginally related to the federal law. Consider Meredith Phillips and Jennifer Flashman's examination of standards-based reform in the 1990s, which finds evidence that testing and accountability can change teacher behavior in positive ways. Or look at the dandy of a chapter by Thomas Dee and Brian Jacob, which studied the impact of high school exit exams—not required by NCLB—on various student outcomes, including college completion and future earnings. Their bottom line: these tests, by and large, depress high school graduation rates while failing to predict success in college or work. Still, the effort provides at least a few morsels for the NCLB-obsessed. Tom Loveless pens a provocative piece on the politics of the federal law, finding support for NLCB strongest among minorities and the middle class. It's a worthwhile read, just not cover to cover.



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*Wiki*pedia or *Wicked*pedia?

Assessing the online encyclopedia's impact on K–12 education

BY MICHAEL J. PETRILLI

Mention Wikipedia within the ivy-covered walls of the academy and you'll find no shortage of opinions, ranging from wildly enthusiastic to mildly apocalyptic. That's no surprise: the web site, available for free and developed by an army of volunteers, raises questions that lie at the heart of scholarship and inquiry. What is the value of expertise? Who owns knowledge? Should we trust the "wisdom of crowds" or fear the mob?

In the workaday world of elementary and secondary education, however, these philosophical musings seem less to the point. The questions are simpler: Can an online encyclopedia that's edited by anyone, and thus no one, be trusted as a credible information source? Should students be encouraged to tap this tool as a supplement to their textbooks? And is it even *possible* to discourage its use?

To find out, my research intern and I performed a simple experiment. We selected 100 terms from prominent U.S. and world history textbooks (Prentice Hall's *America: Pathways to the Present* and *World History: Connections to Today—The Modern Era*). We chose a mix of items that students might be asked to research for a test or paper, from the Mayflower Compact to the War Powers Act, from the Protestant Reformation to Anwar Sadat. And we entered each term into Google to find out which web sites the ubiquitous search engine suggests as the most useful links.

The results are astounding. Google listed Wikipedia as the number-one hit a remarkable 87 times out of 100. The encyclopedia came in second 12 times and third once. In other words, the Wikipedia site was listed among the top three Google hits *100 percent* of the time.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this finding. First, people searching for information about these historical terms are finding the entries from Wikipedia helpful; that's why Google is listing them so prominently. As a result, even if students do not seek out Wikipedia, Wikipedia will find them. Second, "banning" the use of Wikipedia appears hopelessly naive. As Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia's co-founder, told the *New York Times*, "They might as well say don't listen to rock 'n' roll either." (Blocking Wikipedia isn't so hard; some older "child-safe" Internet filters block the entire site because of its occasional objectionable pages.)

But are students likely to find good information once they reach the site? We randomly selected 10 of our 100 terms and compared the treatment given to them by Wikipedia, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and the textbooks themselves. The entries from Wikipedia sure are comprehensive, or at least verbose. At more than 3,000 words, the Wikipedia write-ups are more than twice as long, on average, as those of *Britannica*, and almost eight times as long as the passages from the textbooks.

And, to our admittedly untrained eyes, the information from Wikipedia appeared just as reliable. (A 2006 *Nature* article found roughly the same number of errors in entries from the two encyclopedias on various scientific topics, so our "findings" are consistent.) We certainly didn't notice any discrepancies. (See our web site for a list of the ten terms if you'd like to test them yourself.)

The reason the content is relatively reliable is probably because these terms are fairly mainstream. "The high-traffic areas are going to be the cleanest," Wiki expert Alexander M. C. Halavais told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Thus high-school level content is likely to be less error-prone than arcane subjects studied in graduate school.

As a K–12 educational tool, then, Wikipedia appears to pass the test, at least to the limited degree that any encyclopedia assists the learning process. Still, that doesn't mean the site is perfect. As a resource about hot-button political issues, Wikipedia is notoriously subject to manipulation and spin. This is apparent in its treatment of education policy issues.

For example, its entry on "school voucher" (which comes up first on Google) gives twice as much ink to opponents as supporters. Furthermore, it includes spurious and unsupported claims such as this: "Opponents also claim that the vouchers are tantamount to providing taxpayer-subsidized 'white flight' from urban public schools." (The vast majority of students receiving taxpayer-subsidized vouchers in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and the District of Columbia are, of course, nonwhite.)

So here's a rule of thumb: When elementary and secondary students are researching history, Wikipedia is a decent place to start. When they or others are researching education policy, though, tapping another resource is in order. May I suggest *educationnext.org*?

Screens Down

Students teach the wonders of technology

BY IAN EARLE

I received the notice via snail mail, interestingly enough, that my 9th-grade summer school students would each arrive with an Apple iBook in tow. The attached questionnaire asked how comfortable I felt with technology in the classroom, and might I possibly need a refresher course if I marked the box next to "What is a laptop?"

The incoming freshmen are the first class to enter this high school under the One to One program, one computer for every student. These kids were born with technology surrounding them and take the World Wide Web for granted. Many of their teachers, however, have had to learn these new school tricks.

I marked the box "Adequate Knowledge." I knew how to surf to my favorite web sites and have been known to give a PowerPoint presentation when the stars and planets were in perfect alignment. I'll admit I did wonder that first day, when each student unsheathed a sleek, white laptop from an aerodynamic black computer case, whether my old-school teaching moves could compete. Every subsequent morning was the same. Instead of pencil and paper, computers stood at the ready, screens up.

I wanted my students to know that their teacher was no tech slouch. I wrote my e-mail address on the whiteboard and told my students offhandedly that they could e-mail the homework. They quickly called my bluff. That first night, I received 19 e-mails and 19 attachments.

I have adapted. I've figured out how to write comments on the documents they send and, more impressively, mail each one back to the author. I use my "caps lock" key for this, although I was reminded by a visibly upset student one morning that using all capital letters online is read as shouting these days. I suppose my students will have to adapt to my daily rants.

There are obvious benefits to having technological aids at the fingertips of every student. Word meanings and origins are available within seconds. Quickly scribbled lecture notes no longer need to be deciphered later on. But there are also some drawbacks.

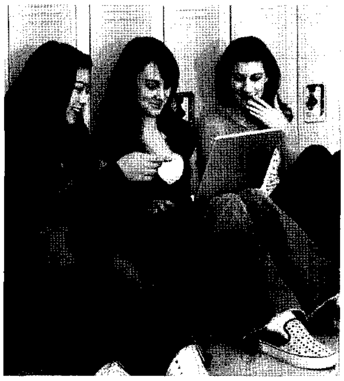

PHOTO / GETTY IMAGES

With the advent of e-mailed homework, I feel as if I've opened Pandora's inbox....The school week has become a seven-day week for student and teacher alike.

Yesterday, one of my students dropped his laptop on the floor. A stunned silence filled the room. Ever so lovingly, he gathered the fallen computer and flipped his screen up while the rest of us watched in horror, mouths agape. He reported somberly, "Yup, the screen is broken." This was a loaner computer, mind you. His own laptop was already in the school IT repair shop.

Excuses have evolved. The dog ate my homework doesn't cut it anymore. Three of my students pleaded with me for an extra day to complete a major project, citing "lack of power." (I assume they were referring to computer power.) We have all experienced the pain of technological malfunction. How can I not be sympathetic to their sob stories?

Back in the day, or last summer to be more precise, teachers were afforded at least a 24-hour cushion for returning student work. With the advent of e-mailed homework, I feel as if I've opened Pandora's inbox. If I receive a paper Saturday evening, I feel a burning need to grade it and respond with comments as quickly as possible, no matter what other plans I have. In short, the school week has become a seven-day week for student and teacher alike.

Technology is here to stay. I've requested mirrors for the walls of my classroom so that I can see who is IM-ing whom. In the meantime, when I see a student laughing while supposedly looking at a web site I know is not funny, I can go old school on him. Instead of "pencils down," though, the new phrase is "screens down!" Yeah, I can handle technology in the classroom.

Ian Earle teaches Spanish at Punahou School in Honolulu, Hawaii.

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